

Report for Foundation for Professionals in Services for Adolescents (FPSA)

Higher Diploma in Systemic Psychotherapy – Family Therapy (Year II) at Clanwilliam Institute of Systemic Psychotherapy, Dublin, Ireland.

Training Commenced: September 2016 & Completed June 2017.

Expression of Gratitude:

Initially may I take the opportunity to thank the FPSA for the funds allocated to me to help me complete Year 2 of Systemic Psychotherapy/Family Therapy training. Without the FPSA this opportunity would not have been possible. I had previously completed Year 1 of the course which consisted of mainly theory and introductory modules and was keen to get to grips with more practical elements and continue my theory – practice application.

Summary of Training/Methods Studied

Modules: Social Constructionism, Narrative Therapy, Beyond Content Ethics, Working with Clients with Experience of Domestic Violence, Working with Adolescents and their Families, Working with Couples & Psychosexual Issues, Systemic Formulation, Law & Psychotherapy, Adult Mental Health, Child Protection, Theory & Practice Links, Research.

PPD: Personal Professional Development (similar to group therapy).

Client Work – Direct Client Work & Observation of other Trainees, 'Live Supervision', use & participation of 'reflecting team's, video-analysis, reflecting journaling, note/report writing etc.

Practical Application

Due to maternity leave I sought an external placement working in a counselling service with young people and was able to use my systemic ideas and practices in this setting. However, recently I have recommenced my post in the Child & Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) and am eager to use my fledgling skills further in my work with children/adolescents and their families. I believe that adopting a systemic approach to the challenges and problems clients bring to CAMHS helps widen the formulation, widen the therapeutic approaches, include a more strengths based approach and ensure better/alternative outcomes than traditional approaches. I believe that particularly in our work with young people involving the parents/family/significant systems is fundamental to ensuring best outcomes. Clinical guidelines would be supportive of this approach. In my training, Systemic Theory, the Milan Approach and Social Constructionism have given me new lenses, new approaches and methods in my work with families.

Experience of Training

I found the training both deconstructing and reconstructing, but vastly enriching professionally and indeed personally. There were challenges in relation to adopting a new approach to my understanding of my work and society; social constructionism and systemic views to challenge my more traditional 'modernistic' lenses and also my work in PDD (Personal Professional Development) and ongoing self and relational reflexivity (core skills in relation to psychotherapy and ethically sound psychotherapy practices). Input in relation to Burnham's GRRRAACCEESSS helped here, clinical supervision and PPD were vital. We covered many useful topics during the year, not least the module on Working with Adolescents, Narrative Therapy and Working with Domestic Violence. The training has

opened up a new clinical world and in a way with an alternative epistemology a new way of my viewing the world; how the clinical and real world are one; how systemic work and family therapy fit this. I find that I have new lens(es), new knowledge, new skills and though I was enthusiastic to begin with, I am now imbued with greater as well as new enthusiasms! I am eager to learn more and to consolidate theory to practise links!

Usefulness of it in my work/wider context.

My work in CAMHS is largely with adolescents due to the nature of referrals to our service. I work with adolescents and their families as both a Clinical Speech & Language Therapist and a Mental Health Professional (now a Family Therapy Trainee). I will speak a little from both positions.

Perhaps due to my Speech & Language Therapy Training and work with children with what is termed 'Selective Mutism' I am particularly interested in the applicability of using my Family Therapy skills with families who attend CAMHS with this symptom or diagnosis. Today in CAMHS I commenced work with one such family; service users who attended CAMHS first some 10 years and engaged in a more behavioural (individual/child-only) approach and who now as a family system continue to struggle with their relationship with anxiety and for one member with Selective Mutism. I hope that my work in today's session helped to introduce a 'newness' for the family; that stances/techniques such as Milan's 'curiosity' and 'circular questions' and a different 'languag-ing' have widened the scope of possibility for them. In this instance, we plan to look at anxiety at a family or at a wider systemic level, to collaborate on a systemic formulation and to work systemically to tackle the challenges this family face. This is but an example of the work I now can do, but I hope to continue to develop my family therapy skills to help young people therapeutically and to marry these skills with my knowledge base and skills as a communication therapist (SLT). Family Therapy is applicable or useful for many of the young people attending CAMHS and I now can offer this service (as a trainee with admittedly a Year 2 skill base). Young people with varied diagnosis of depression, low mood, self-harm, OCD, eating disorders etc. can now receive a service from a trainee.

Whilst working as a 'pure' Clinical Speech & Language (*I realise this is false dichotomy) my family therapy training has allowed me access to a knowledge base regarding Narrative Therapy for working with clients/families with what are termed 'Fluency Disorders' and also 'Psychogenic Voice Disorders', but also useful across the wide remit of young people and clients that present with various 'Communication Disorders' and what are termed 'co-morbid' mental health disorders.

My intention to use in work role now/future.

In future, I hope to complete the full training. I find that I have a new knowledge, a knowledge of what I do know, what I do not know and strangely an awareness that I do not know- what I do and do not know.. I feel that I am on voyage of self and relational discovery, essential for a systemic psychotherapist; a journey as a person and therapist, however there is lots more to do. I would like to build on my understanding of Systemic Practice and my skill base by working with young people in CAMHS. I would hope to develop my Systemic skill base further to use in supervision with MDT members, SLT's, SLT Trainees and other mental health professionals.

Recommendations for others.

Systemic Psychotherapy is very much situated now in Social Constructionism, it may be

helpful to do a little reading regarding this prior to the course. Though I was aware of constructivism, I found this fascinating as I believe I and many others tend to be largely modernistic (as well as linear) in our professional (and personal thinking).

Generally, I also found it useful to adopt the position that to be truly social constructionist in ones approach you must not throw the 'baby out with a baby water' and should keep in mind useful concepts/practices from the early stages of Family Therapy as well as the other schools of psychotherapy. As Carr (2012) emphasises it would be unethical not to do what works. I found that my appetite for other psychotherapies and how to utilise these therapeutically is well and truly whetted and invite others to consider the same in their work with clients.

I found the Alan Carr's book (2012) and also Dallos and Draper (2010) book very useful for me at my stage of learning as a Trainee Systemic Psychotherapist.

I found the Personal Professional Development (PPD) which may be viewed a sort of group therapy very useful in relation to self-reflexivity, relational reflexivity and group processes. This combined with supervision was both de-constructing and enriching.

Finally, I would recommend the course for therapists working with young people, children and adolescents, couples and individuals if systemically minded!

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