

Report for FPSA funding 2016

I am extremely grateful for the funding I received from the FPSA to complete my third year of my MSc in Systemic Psychotherapy. This is a four year course, with years 3 and 4 being the MSc qualifying training. As I reflect on the last academic year my learning has been significant. At times over the year this has been a challenge, as anyone who has worked and studied simultaneously will identify with.

I am a social worker working within a CAMHS social work team, co-located within a Community CAMHS team. As a CAMHS social worker I often work with the most vulnerably young people in society, where environmental factors impact on or contribute to a deterioration of their mental health. In recent months there has been an emphasis placed on trying to reduce the risk of young people entering Local Authority care, as well as supporting children/young people returning home to birth families from care. Providing support at this stage is hugely important as young people who have been in the care system consistently have poor mental health outcomes. The National Audit Office (2015) highlighted the need and importance of emotional and mental health support for this group of young people.

I qualified as a social worker in 2003 and spent time considering post qualifying training options. I found that systemic therapy fitted with both my social work and personal values when considering how to support children and young people experiencing mental health difficulties. This is done by strengthening relationships between young people and their care givers and helping them to understand how behaviour and the environment can negatively impact on mental health, such as overly critical parenting or domestic abuse. This also involves helping young people and their family to identify relationship patterns, in order that these can be questioned, challenged and hopefully not repeated. It is also possible to work with young people individually while using a systemic model, through the use of genograms, narrative therapy, life script work, all of which provide a way of exploring and changing negative internal working models that are often linked to poor mental health in young people.

During this academic year I have been on placement in a child and adolescent mental health unit. This has been a new experience for me as I have not worked in an inpatient unit before. This was a challenging setting to work in at first because the idea of admitting young people to a mental health unit, often against their will, raised ethical questions for me. Since completing my placement I can see that there are instances when this is necessary and beneficial. Within an inpatient setting young people have access to a range of therapies and a multidisciplinary team dedicated to their care. The family therapy team is one such team. Within the family therapy team we worked with families in a variety of formats; young person and parents, young person-parents and siblings, parents alone. In this way the whole system received support to help them change, rather than the young person in

isolation. I feel that this is the most effective way of long lasting improvements to the young person's mental health.

I will embark on my final year of the MSc in Systemic Psychotherapy with the same level of enthusiasm with which I started this one. My final placement will be in a community CAMHS setting and I am looking forward to continuing my learning within a different setting and bringing this back to the young people and families with whom I work in my agency.

Joanne Taylor