

## Report for FPSA Funding 2016-17

### MSc in Systemic Family Therapy

I would like to take this opportunity to extend a huge heartfelt thankyou to the board at FPSA for enabling me to complete the first year of the MSc at Kings College. I had been working as a social worker with young people on the edge and 'in' local authority care for several years. I completed 2 years training to become a Systemic Practitioner in 2010 and have been using these ideas with young people and their networks for several years. Their usefulness in enabling young people to access more resourceful and hopeful stories about themselves and their futures has been very rewarding and I hope meaningful for the children and young people I have worked with in the past.

However, this year of the master's course has enabled me to take my learning and practice forward towards qualification and accreditation as a fully qualified Family Systemic psychotherapist. I will be starting my second year in September 16 as I have successfully completed the first year. During this year, I have extended my understanding of systemic theory and deepened my skills in working with children, young people and their families enormously.

The course includes academic lectures, seminars and clinical work within a clinical supervision group. My current placement is within a more traditional mental health setting of the Maudsley eating disorder service which I have never experienced before. Here, I am working with several families where a young person has a diagnosis of an eating disorder, together with issues such as diagnosed personality disorder or O.C.D for example. This experience has been amazing and incredibly interesting. I have been developing my understanding around how the 'problem' can organise the whole family and developing use of techniques such as internalised Other and Externalisation to good effect. It has been rewarding using techniques to enable the family to see the problem as the problem rather than the young person. Each person has an impact on the 'problem' and a responsibility for change.

My next placement starting in October will be in a Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) setting taking a range of referrals and presenting problems. I am looking forward to developing my understanding and skills in working with children and their families within a supervised group where my work will be videoed and feedback given in order to develop my ability to be helpful to children, young people and their families.

Despite using systemic ideas in my social work practice for over 8 years my understanding and abilities have improved enormously over the past year. I have been able to apply my learning from the course and live supervision groups into working as a clinician with young people with offending behaviours and more recently those at risk of safeguarding issues and on the edge of care. Both within Southwark children's services. Here, I work directly with children, young people and their families where contextual factors such as poverty, racism, depression, poor housing, refugees, trauma, and risk of child sexual exploitation, domestic violence and parental mental health are features. I am providing family therapy to young people and families who would not ordinarily receive such a service. Part of my remit too is to support and enhance social workers to think of the children, young people and their families in more systemic terms meaning that they become less risk averse, think about how they influence what may be happening and to develop resilience and strengths within the families they work with; where it is safe to do so.

One example of the work I am working is with a family where the children are subject a child protection plan and one of the young people is on the edge of being received into the care of the local authority and at risk of child sexual exploitation. I am using theories such as transgenerational family scripts, co-ordinated management of meaning and attachment narrative therapy to try and strengthen the relationship between mother and daughter and facilitate conversations where they can understand each other's perspectives more and do something different with each other. The mother is developing understanding that the way she is parenting is informed by gender, cultural and parenting beliefs passed down to her. However, these intersected with the life cycle transitions and difficult contextual factors mean that they may not all be worthy of repeating and possibly new ways of parenting may need to be improvised to keep her children safe. I am supporting her with this and engaging the young person to try and share with her mother about what may be going on for her. This past year has not only enabled a deeper skill set and technique to be applied here. But, also a real development of myself as a more reflexive practitioner. I have ideas and templates for how family life should be and am keenly aware that these will not necessarily fit for others. I am more keenly aware of when my ideas are influencing me and of issues of power and culture.

Another example of my current work is working with a young person and his mother who have fled domestic violence and are currently living in a refuge. There are some behavioural issues which many are labelling as ADHD. The young person is being viewed in problem saturated ways by many in his network without the contextual factors being thought through fully. Upon hearing these stories about himself there is a risk that this young person will continue to internalise these ideas and act into these stories. I am currently doing sessions using the Tree of Life (which I never knew about before the

course) in order to separate out the 'problem' from the person and facilitate the development of stories of resilience, strength and achievement. I am also using a number of theories and techniques for his mother to think about how his experiences may have impacted upon him, but also ways in which she can enable him to share worries, feel safe and contained by her.

I wish to extend my thanks once again to FPSA for their financial support to complete the 1<sup>st</sup> years of the MSc, without which I would not have been able to complete. I am very much looking forward to continuing to develop as a systemic family therapist and I would like to take this opportunity to request continued support to fund my second year in MSc in Systemic Family Therapy at Kings College London.

Karen Gaughan 17.07.16