

Training Officer and Post Adoption Support Worker.

### **Details of Training**

I received funding to attend An Introduction to Sensory Attachment Intervention: SAI Foundation Module. The course was held remotely on the 24<sup>th</sup>, 31<sup>st</sup> March and the 1<sup>st</sup> April 2025 from 9:00 am – 4:30 pm (22.5 hours). The trainer was Nick Smith, the Clinical Director from Juniper Tree Therapy in Yorkshire. I completed the course and will receive my certificate for the module shortly.

### **Brief Summary of Training**

Sensory Attachment Intervention (SAI) is an integrative approach to the treatment of children and adults who have suffered abuse or neglect. Negative experiences in the womb and in early childhood impact on our capacity to cope with stress throughout life. There is a tendency to either: flee and fight, freeze and dissociate, or fluctuate between these stress states when there is a hint or a reminder of traumatic events. Sensory Attachment Intervention explores the regulation of arousal states and also focuses on facilitating the modulation of the body senses through a combination of upregulating and downregulating experiences. Furthermore, the sensory and attachment patterns of parents / carers are also addressed as attachment is a co-regulation process.

On the first day of training, Nick took us through the theoretical underpinnings of SAI, demonstrating that it is an approach that has taken a holistic look at research and sought to integrate them into a thorough but flexible approach which promotes understanding young people's behaviour through a number of lenses. The second day of training dove into sensory processing, particularly sensory modulation, and we explored what kind of difficulties people may have with this, how it may present and the types of activities we can do to support. The third day followed a similar format but focused more on sensory discrimination. Despite being online, Nick and his colleagues were able to present us with a number of practical activities to try in order to experience their effects on our own sensory regulation and consider the implications for practice.

### **My Experience of the Training**

I thoroughly enjoyed this training and it made me wish that I'd taken a different career path many years ago and become an OT so that I could continue with my learning in this area and practice SAI as a therapeutic intervention! Despite knowing that I cannot practice it in this way, this training has really helped me to see the work I do with young people and their families in a new light.

Understanding the four levels of self-regulation has helped me to recognise that much of the work that I do and support parents to do focuses on Level 1, Level 3 and Level 4 – however if I am honest I can reflect that perhaps the work I do within Level 1 is rushed in order to get to the bits that 'feel' like they are more important at the higher levels. However, I now recognise that if there are gaps in Level 1 and Level 2, work at Level 3 and Level 4 will not be successful. This has validated the work I do at Level 1 and encouraged me to ensure that it is not rushed. Furthermore, the training opened up a whole new way of working within Level 2 to ensure

that young people are ready to engage with the more demanding self-regulation tools at higher stages. Interestingly, this training has complimented my earlier Theraplay (also funded via FPSA) as many Theraplay activities work really well in the Level 2 Self-Regulation zone, however attending the SAI training has helped me to understand more fully why they work and how they can be subtly adapted to meet the needs of the young person I am with.

I have only been back at work one day since attending this training and am full of ideas about how I can update adolescent training for our adopters, the conversations I will have with families and introducing this new knowledge into my direct work with young people. I would whole heartedly recommend this training to anyone working with young people who have experienced developmental trauma or working with their parents / carers and I am thankful to the FPSA for providing the funding that allowed me to attend this training and develop my practice.