

Head, Heart, Hands



At The Fostering Network, we are committed to innovative practice and promoting positive change within fostering that will provide children and young people with the opportunity to reach their full potential.

Through the Head, Heart, Hands programme, we have spent four years working closely with seven local authorities and independent fostering providers, to explore the impact of introducing social pedagogy into UK foster care.

With the programme now complete we are proud to be able to share the learning that we hope will influence fostering policy and practice.

About social pedagogy

Social pedagogy is an academic discipline that forms the bedrock of social care in much of Europe and Scandinavia. It is a relationship based approach that brings together a range of social science disciplines, enabling people to work with their **Head** – putting theory and critical reflection into their practice, **Heart** – using empathy and utilising their own experiences and personality, and **Hands** – making the most of time spent together in practical every day activities.

What we've learned

A social pedagogic approach to foster care can provide an **ethical and theoretical framework** which enhances and builds on existing practice. Through supporting the development of **improved relationships**, social pedagogy can provide important benefits for children and young people, their foster carers, and the other professionals in the team around them.

Social pedagogy can help fostered children and young people to have a **positive experience of family life**, with deeper, more trusting and equal relationships. With foster carers better able to understand their needs, children and young people who lived in Head, Heart, Hands families reported feeling **more confident, empowered, and valued**.

Social pedagogy can support foster carers to navigate their way through the unique demands of their vital role – helping them find an effective **balance between the professional and the personal**. It provides tools and approaches that help them to understand their needs and the needs of the young people in their care, enabling them to support and prioritise wellbeing across the whole fostering household.

Social pedagogy can provide a platform for fostering services to take a '**people above process**' approach to supporting looked after children, including tackling procedural and cultural barriers, and putting relationships and values at the heart of decision making.

Social pedagogic cultural change across a whole service needs to be part of an organisation's strategic plan and requires focused investment of time and resources. However, as a first step, immediate benefits can be achieved by introducing some of the key concepts and models which **enhance the practice of foster carers and social care staff**.

Programme activities

Learning and development courses

- One day taster sessions
- Two day orientation courses
- Eight day core courses for 40-60 participants per service

Introduction of a theoretical framework with new tools and concepts including:

- Lifeworld Orientation
- Diamond Model
- Common Third
- Learning Zone Model
- Three Ps
- Haltung
- Reflective practice
- Non-violent communication
- Four Fs

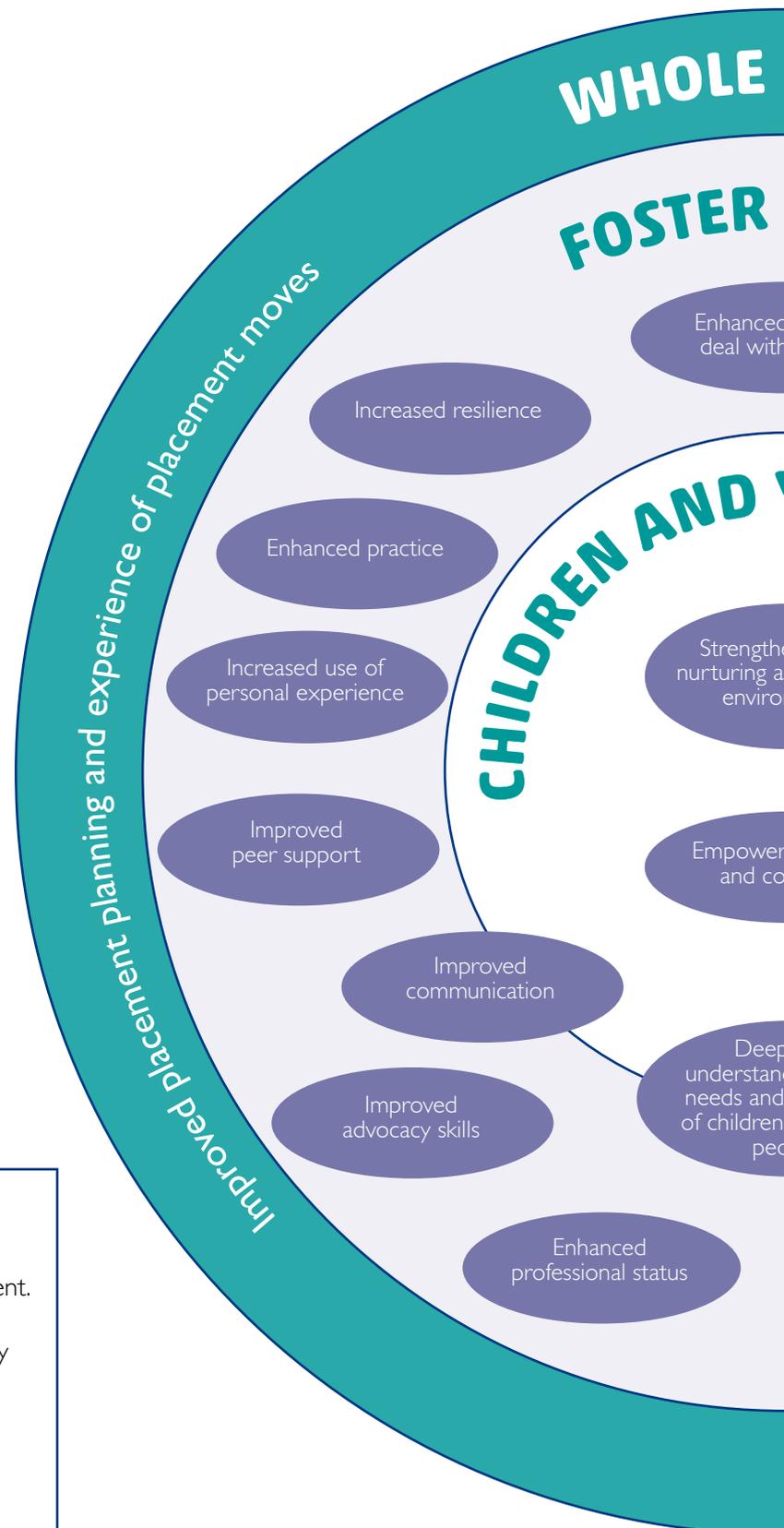
Social pedagogic expertise

- 12 social pedagogues
- Leadership, strategic support and guidance from the Social Pedagogy Consortium
- Formal and informal review and development of policy and practice

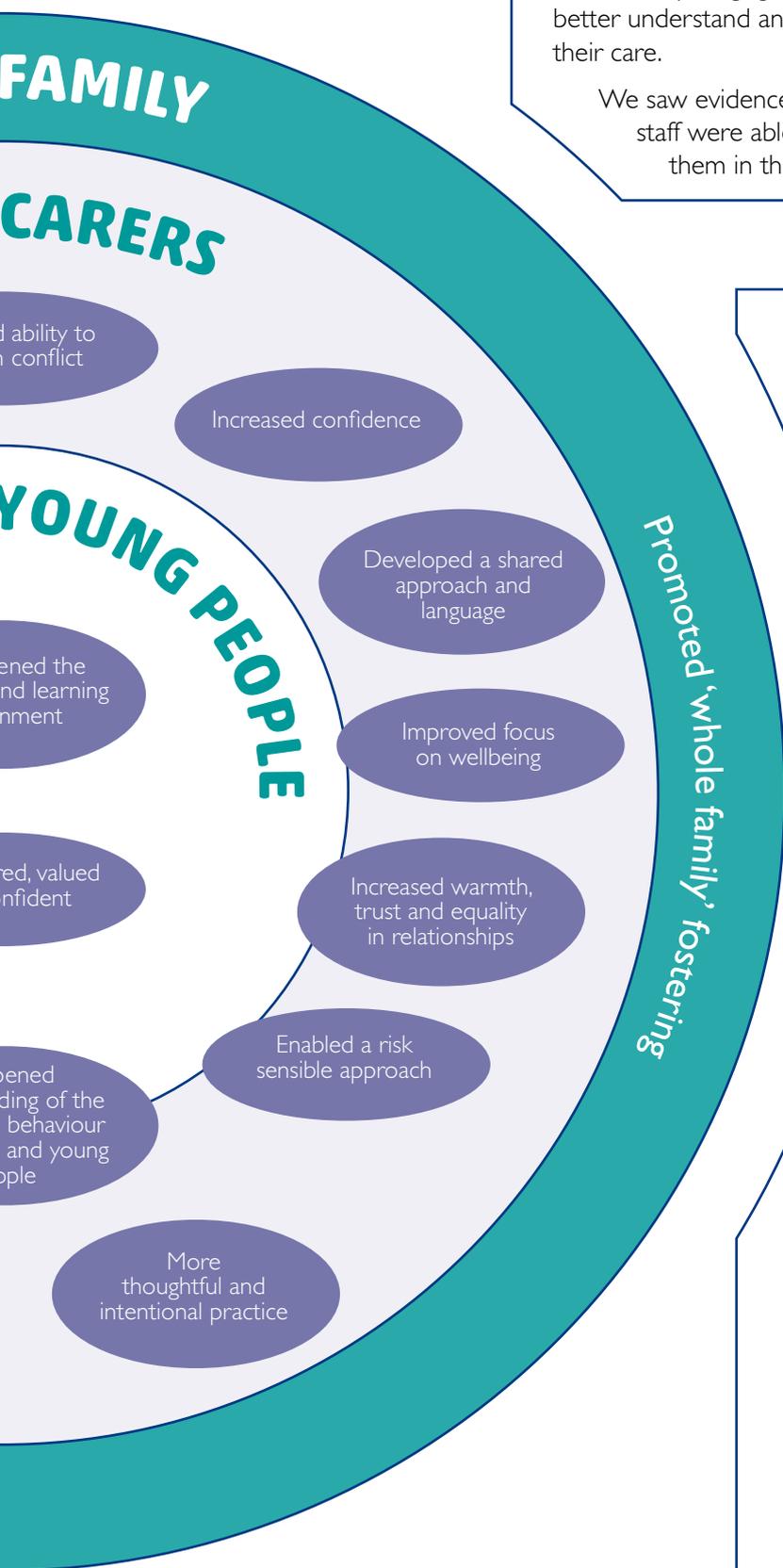
Ongoing learning activities, momentum groups and the production of resources and materials to further develop a social pedagogic approach to build sustainable in-house expertise and training.

Context

Over the four years of the programme, we have had to adapt to meet the realities of a changing environment. This environment was characterised by increasing numbers of children and young people and complexity of need within the care system; significant changes to the fostering landscape (policy context and delivery models); public sector austerity and budget cuts; high levels of social care staff fatigue and turn-over and increased risk aversion due to high profile cases and greater public scrutiny.



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Enhanced practice

Foster carers reported that the training provided an empowering set of core social pedagogic principles, tools and models which helped them to better understand and meet the needs of the children and young people in their care.

We saw evidence of immediate impact where foster carers and service staff were able to take the theories and models provided and embed them in their day-to-day practice.

Stronger relationships

Head, Heart, Hands provided tools, approaches and skills that gave people a deeper understanding of how to develop and maintain relationships.

Relationships between foster carers and children and young people become stronger, characterised by increased trust, equality, authenticity and open dialogue. Through these stronger relationships, foster carers felt better equipped to care and advocate for children and young people, who themselves reported feeling more valued, trusted and empowered.

Improved communication

Communication is central to social pedagogy and foster carers became increasingly skilled at using critical reflection and the theory of non-violent communication in their everyday interactions.

They become more aware of what they were communicating, how they were communicating it, as well as how it was being received by children and young people in their care and the other professionals they worked with. This increased skill and confidence in communication enhanced relationships and supported foster carers to feel more confident in dealing with conflict and difficult situations.

Foster carers reported feeling that social pedagogy had helped them defuse situations that may previously have led to placement instability and breakdown, and supported them to provide a calmer and more nurturing environment for children and young people.

Impact – fostering services

- Strengthened relationships and teamwork between foster carers and professionals in the team around the child through improved communication, increased empathy, and reduced barriers and hierarchies.
- A shared theoretical framework and language between foster carers and other professionals in the team around the child.
- A stronger community of better resourced foster carers who feel more confident, empowered, and valued by the service and better able to meet the demands of their role.
- Improved placement experiences and strengthened placement planning/placement move processes.
- Enhanced peer support enabling foster carers to share experiences and ideas to increase their resilience and longevity.
- Reinvigorated social worker practice.
- Enabled foster carers to be stronger, more confident advocates for children and young people, giving fostering services more confidence that the needs of individual children will be met.
- Enabled services to better identify and utilise the skills of their foster carers and staff.
- Enhanced existing training.

Strengthened relationships between foster carers and other professionals in the team around the child

Foster carers and supervising social workers who were able to train together reported that their relationships had improved – even those who had previously characterised that relationship as poor. The shared learning environment, new models and approaches, and the enhanced skills in critical reflection gave people the tools and language needed to understand and value different perspectives. This in turn led to an increased empathy, equality and improved teamwork, all of which improved the quality and consistency of the support provided to young people.

Foster carers feel more confident, empowered, informed and valued within the service

The evaluation stressed the value to services of having confident and empowered foster carers who felt valued and better able to cope with the challenges of their role. Foster carers who took part in Head, Heart, Hands also reported that the skills and knowledge they gained from social pedagogy reduced prolonged periods of stress. It can be hypothesised that in the longer terms this could have an impact on foster carer wellbeing and retention.

Impact – national

The legacy of the Head, Heart, Hands programme has led to a number of UK-wide developments that will support the wider fostering sector including government-level discussions about training and continued professional development for foster carers and social workers and the development of a professional body.

The programme has opened up ongoing dialogue around social pedagogy and innovative practice with national stakeholders including engagement with key national bodies and organisations. These conversations will continue beyond the programme, paving the way to further commitment to wider system change and the development of a tailored UK approach to social pedagogy.

The creation of The Fostering Network's social pedagogy practice forums in England and Scotland has contributed towards stronger professional networks and the sharing of social pedagogic learning within fostering. These networks will enable learning from Head, Heart, Hands, and other social pedagogic practice developments, to be cascaded to strengthen the fostering sector.

The programme learning, in the form of films and practical resources for foster carers, summaries and reports for services leaders, and the programme's independent evaluation reports are available to all on The Fostering Network's website. The wealth of knowledge and evidence within these resources will add to local and national conversations about social pedagogic development and support services starting their exploration of social pedagogy.

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They deal with things differently to most foster carers, they really do and they have helped me so much.

Young person

I think the biggest thing for me is I am kind to myself and I really understand that importance of my own wellbeing - to be well and fit and happy so I can then look after other people. That is definitely something I lacked before social pedagogy.

Foster carer

What I've learned through Head, Heart, Hands has been validating and quite freeing...to have an approach that justifies you investing time into relationships. There's a justification there for investing your resources in something that is not going to be seen by court, or picked up on an inspection.

Social worker

Social pedagogy is a massive gap in England and I do believe we could have a much higher achievement and better outcome if we would use more social pedagogic strategies.

Independent reviewing officer

The social pedagogic concept of shared life-space really supports the fostering family as a normal loving family.

Foster carer

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Programme partners

We would like to thank our funders and delivery partners for their extraordinary work over the course of the Head, Heart, Hands programme.

Funders

Comic Relief, Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, The Henry Smith Charity, John Ellerman Foundation, KPMG Foundation, The Man Group Charitable Trust and The Monument Trust

Demonstration Sites

Aberlour Foster Care, Capstone Foster Care (South West), the City of Edinburgh Council, the London Borough of Hackney, Orkney Islands Council, Staffordshire County Council and Surrey County Council

Social Pedagogy Consortium

Jacaranda Recruitment Ltd, Pat Petrie, Professor at the UCL Institute of Education, ThemPra Social Pedagogy CIC

Evaluators

The Centre for Child and Family Research at Loughborough University who are working in partnership with The Colebrooke Centre for Evidence and Implementation

Further information

Further information about the delivery and evaluation of Head, Heart, Hands:
thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/HHH

Further information about the Head, Heart, Hands delivery partners in the social pedagogy consortium visit:

jacaranda-recruitment.co.uk

thempra.org.uk

ucl.ac.uk/ioe

Please get in touch to find out more about support and training.

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