
The evaluation of Head, Heart, Hands

Introducing social pedagogy into UK foster care

Final synthesis report: executive summary

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Introduction

This is the final report of the evaluation of Head, Heart, Hands. It is part of a suite of reports produced by the independent evaluation team led by the Centre for Child and Family Research, Loughborough University, in partnership with the Colebrook Centre for Evidence and Implementation. Previous reports have explored the impact of Head, Heart, Hands on foster carers and children and young people in the first two years of the programme (McDermid, et al., 2014; 2015), the economic impact of Head, Heart, Hands¹, along with an in-depth analysis of how the programme was implemented (Ghate and McDermid, 2016)². In this final report we bring together data presented elsewhere with the final analysis of the impact of Head, Heart, Hands on those foster carers and children and young people who participated in the programme. We also examine the linkages between the way that the programme unfolded and the outcomes it has achieved. The aim of the evaluation was to ascertain how far the Head, Heart, Hands programme achieved the aims and objectives outlined in Box 1, by addressing the following over-arching research questions:

1. What changes does the Head, Heart, Hands programme offer children and young people in foster care?
2. What changes does the Head, Heart, Hands programme offer foster carers' and their practice?
3. What changes does the Head, Heart, Hands programme offer the system of supporting children and young people in foster care and their carers?

Head, Heart, Hands was carried out between September 2012 and June 2016, as an ambitious demonstration programme within UK foster care, directly involving both foster carers and staff in fostering services and agencies. Its stated overarching aim was to '*develop a social pedagogic approach within UK foster care, thereby increasing the numbers of young people in foster care who achieve their potential and make a positive contribution to society*'. To achieve this, The Fostering Network identified the following objectives (See Box 1)³.

Box 1: The objectives of Head, Heart, Hands

- To develop a professional, confident group of foster carers who will be able to demonstrate that by using a social pedagogic approach, they will develop the capacity to significantly improve the day to day lives of the children in their care.
- To develop social pedagogic characteristics in foster carers. Foster carers will have an integration of 'head, hands and heart' to develop strong relationships with the children they look after.
- To implement systemic change and a cultural shift which will support social pedagogic practice and recognise the central role of foster carers in shaping the lives of children within their care.
- To provide a platform for transformation of the role that foster carers play as part of the child's network.

Source: *The Fostering Network (2011) Head, Hands and Heart Bringing up Children in Foster Care: A Social Pedagogic Approach: Funding Proposal*. London: The Fostering Network.

Seven demonstration sites (four in England, and three in Scotland) participated in the programme, which consists of a number of activities including: Learning and Development courses provided to up to 40 foster carers per site, employment of Social Pedagogues, 'momentum groups'⁴ and reviewing the policies and procedures of fostering services through a social pedagogic lens. Social pedagogic support and expertise is being provided by the 'Social Pedagogy Consortium' (SPC)⁵.

¹ Reports on the evaluation of Head, Heart, Hands that have been published to date are available at <http://www.lboro.ac.uk/research/ccfr/research/exploring/project---head-heart-hands.html>

² A full description is contained in the main report: (http://www.cevi.org.uk/docs2/Implementing_Head_Heart_Hands_Main_Report.pdf); and a summary of key findings is also available at http://cevi.org.uk/docs2/Implementing_Head_Heart_Hands_Summary.pdf

³ For more information about the Head, Heart, Hands programme go to <https://www.thefosteringnetwork.org.uk/policy-practice/head-heart-hands>

⁴ These variously named activities consist of regular meetings open to those who attended the Core Learning and Development courses, to refresh, share and continue to explore social pedagogy and how it translates into practice.

⁵ The Social Pedagogy Consortium is a group of practice and academic specialists from Jacaranda Development; Pat Petrie, Professor Emeritus at the Institute of Education, University of London; and Thempra Social Pedagogy.

Methods

The evaluation used a mixed method approach to gather data from a range of key stakeholders, incorporating longitudinal approaches to explore the evolution of the programme over time. The methods are summarised below:

- **Interviews with Head, Heart, Hands fostering households:** Over the course of the entire evaluation **126** semi-structured interviews were carried out with **76** Head, Heart, Hands foster carers and **64** Interviews were carried out with **52** children and young people. In total 76 Head, Heart, Hands households participated in the evaluation, which is an overall response rate of 34 per cent. Some, but not all of the households participated across multiple time points across the evaluation. The findings of this report are primarily drawn from the interviews undertaken at Wave 3, which consisted of interviews with **57** Head, Heart, Hands foster carers and **37** interviews with the children and young people placed with them.
- **Survey of Head, Heart, Hands foster carers:** Surveys with Head, Heart, Hands carers were distributed at Waves 1 and 3. Analysis was conducted on 98 survey responses in Wave 1 and 47 responses at Wave 3.
- **Interviews and focus groups with social care staff:** A total of 33 social care staff participated in semi-structured interviews or focus groups.
- **Survey of social care staff:** A survey of social care staff was circulated at Wave 2. Analysis was conducted on 48 responses.
- **Case file data:** Case file data were gathered on 332 children and young people placed with 157 Head, Heart, Hands fostering household from five sites.
- **Secondary analysis of national statistical return data:** These data are recorded and collated at a local authority level and then submitted to the Department for Education (England) and the Scottish Government (Scotland) on an annual basis as part of their mandatory reporting and recording requirements. Data were provided by four (local authority) sites.
- **Financial data:** Expenditure and finance data provided both by the central programme team and the sites was analysed and used to calculate a unit cost of Head, Heart, Hands.

The impact of Head, Heart, Hands Receptiveness to social pedagogy

Throughout the evaluation a typology has been used to explore the extent to which the foster carers in the interview sample were enthusiastic about social pedagogic practices, the factors that may influence foster carer's receptiveness to Head, Heart, Hands and whether this level of receptiveness has changed over the timeframe of the evaluation. Broadly speaking, the Engaged Adopters were the most enthusiastic about social pedagogy. This group was highly positive about social pedagogy per se and claimed that they were incorporating it into their own practice. Defended Sceptics were the most ambivalent about Head, Heart, Hands. They did not report to be negative about the notion of social pedagogy per se. Rather, they reported that they were not convinced about the "novelty" of social pedagogy or the impact that it would have on their own practice. The Cautious Optimists were somewhere in the middle of these two groups, reporting to be receptive overall, but tended to describe elements of social pedagogy or specific tools that could be applied to particular circumstances, or with particular children, rather than conceptualising it as an underpinning framework which could be applied to all areas of work with people. Following each interview, the foster carers were grouped into one of these three categories on the basis of their responses.

Encouragingly, over half of the foster carer interview sample in Waves 1 and 3 described themselves as Engaged Adopters, peaking at 70% in Wave 2. The Defended Sceptics represented the smallest proportion of foster carers in each time point, representing 19% of the sample in Wave 1, 7.5% of the sample in Wave 2, and 11% of the sample in Wave 3. Of the sample of foster carers who participated in an interview at multiple evaluation time points, 40% (n=13) changed their level of receptiveness over the course of the programme. Three of these foster carers became more positive about the approach, as they reported to be more confident in practicing social pedagogy and able to more clearly articulate the impact that it had on either themselves and/or the child they cared for. The remaining foster carers (n=10:13%) became less enthusiastic about the approach, due to disappointing experiences in how the programme had been implemented.

Almost two thirds of the children's social care staff who participated in the evaluation at Wave 3 identified themselves as Cautious Optimists (69%) and the remaining third (31%) reported that they were Engaged Adopters. Frontline children's social care staff were more likely to describe social pedagogy as one approach among a plethora of different programmes and interventions when compared to the cohort of foster carers. This finding is perhaps unsurprising given that all of the sites were utilising other training programmes and approaches, to support looked after children, during the Head, Heart, Hands programme. It is likely that the frontline children's social care staff (both supervising social workers and children's social workers) would have been supporting foster carers who were applying a range of approaches, making it difficult or unrealistic for them to preference one approach over another.

Throughout the evaluation it was evident that participants identified resonances between their existing approaches to fostering and the principles and values that underpin social pedagogy. Previous evaluation reports have highlighted variances in the extent to which prior familiarity with social pedagogy inhibited or facilitated engagement and enthusiasm with the programme among children's social care staff. Two thirds of the foster carers interviewed at Wave 3 reported that social pedagogy, or aspects of the approach, aligned with their own practice and ethos. Only two foster carers who participated in the evaluation reported that the social pedagogic approach that Head, Heart, Hands provided was entirely new. For a small number of foster carers who participated in the Wave 3 evaluation, the lack of a clear articulation of the unique contribution Head, Heart, Hands made to existing approaches to care, reduced the extent to which they wanted to engage with the programme, and the impact that they believed it to have made on them and the children and young people placed with them (n=6). In contrast, two thirds of the foster carers who were interviewed at Wave 3 reported that the similarities of Head, Heart, Hands to their own approach was a motivating factor to engage with the programme.

Relationships within the fostering household

Almost a third of the foster carers interviewed (n=18:32%) reported that Head, Heart, Hands had empowered and encouraged them to express warmth, respect and genuine affection for the young person. It was noted that the foster carers interviewed expressed affection for the children and young people they cared for prior to Head, Heart, Hands. Foster carers interviewed in Wave 3 reported that while they had not necessarily changed their behaviours towards the children and young people they cared for; they had been reminded, and therefore become more conscious of the significance of the carer-child relationship, since Head, Heart Hands. Other foster carers reported that Head, Heart, Hands had encouraged them further to invest time and effort into nurturing their relationship with the young person and had given them theoretical and practical tools to do so. Concepts such as the Diamond Model, the Lifeworld Orientation and the Common Third were of particular interest in this regard. In this way, the programme had provided a language and a framework in which to think about that relationship. Two thirds of foster carer survey respondents (n=31:66%) reported that their relationships with their fostered child had changed a great deal since attending the Head, Heart, Hands, Learning and Development courses.

These findings were corroborated by the case file analysis which suggested that language associated with familial warmth, respect and genuine regard was used frequently in the children's case files to describe how the carers perceived the fostering household relationships. A number of children (n=23, 9%) were recorded in the case files as referring to their foster carers in familial terms such as "mum and dad". However, a small number of the case files suggested that the use of familial terms may be selective and linked to children's desire to feel a sense of belonging.

A small number of foster carers who participated in the interviews (n=5:8%) reported that they had become more conscious of the importance of seemingly small, everyday actions that help the child feel cared for and nurtured. Many more foster carers who were interviewed highlighted that the Common Third enabled them to be more conscious of how sharing activities together can create a shared space in which both parties learn together and deepen their relationship. Almost a third of the foster carers interviewed reported that the Common Third encouraged them to reconsider how everyday activities were used to develop their relationship with their fostered child (n=16:28%).

A little under a quarter of the foster carers who took part in the interviews (12:21%) reported that they had been encouraged to share more personal information with their fostered children as a result of Head, Heart, Hands and to use their personal relationship with the child to help them to grow and develop. The concept of the Three Ps was mentioned by these foster carers and was reported to assist them in establishing where the boundaries between the professional, personal and private might be for each individual child, and for each individual foster carer. Like many of the foster carers interviewed, participating frontline children's social care staff from three of the sites reported that the programme had encouraged them to bring more of the personal to their work with the foster carers, allowing them to develop more authentic relationships with them.

Eight (12%) foster carers reported that the concepts and approaches learnt through Head, Heart, Hands, had a positive impact on their relationship with other members of their fostering household. A small number of foster carers reported that they have reconceptualised fostering as a whole family activity, placing greater emphasis on whole family reflection and decision making. For those foster carers who reported that Head, Heart, Hands had a positive impact on their wider family, it is possible to hypothesise that more stable and strong relationships between all members of the fostering household, may create more stable and secure environments in which fostered children can flourish.

A small number of the foster carers who participated in an interview at Wave 3 (n=7:12%) reported that since Head, Heart, Hands, they were more likely to allow the children and young people to participate in activities that they previously would not have allowed them to do. However, frustrations arose when these decisions were not supported by social care staff.

The impact of Head, Heart, Hands on foster carers

The majority of foster carers in the interview sample were able to identify at least one way in which Head, Heart, Hands had influenced them as foster carers (n=54:95%). It is encouraging to note that only three out of the 57 foster carers interviewed reported that Head, Heart, Hands had not impacted on their practice in anyway. Likewise, when asked what the best thing about Head, Heart, Hands was, just under half of the Wave 3 foster carer survey respondents reported that the programme had had a positive influence on their practice (n=21:49%). These findings are corroborated by the case file analysis, which identified at least one way in which the foster carers were practising social pedagogically in around half of the households included in the case file analysis (n=74:47%).

The view that the theoretical approaches explored through Head, Heart, Hands provided a framework through which to articulate existing knowledge about good practice was commonly cited among the foster carer interviews. These foster carers noted that although they may not have dramatically changed what they were doing with the children and young people on a day to day basis, they were more thoughtful and intentional in their actions. In this way, Head, Heart, Hands was described by some foster carers in the interview sample as enhancing to their practice, enabling them to apply professional knowledge and skills as different circumstances arose. These foster carers were of the view that putting labels on things they were already doing was in itself helpful in making them more mindful of their existing behaviours. A third of the foster carers interviewed reported that the provision of a theoretical framework through Head, Heart, Hands validated their existing approach to care, giving them more confidence that their current practice was along the right tracks (n=19:33%). It was also reported that the common language prompted through Head, Heart, Hands, enabled some of the participating foster carers to articulate their practice (n=13:22%). The result was a proportion of foster carers in the interview sample who felt more assured in their own skills, and therefore more confident liaising with children's social care staff and advocating for the child.

While a third of the foster carers who participated in the evaluation reported that the provision of a framework for understanding practice was highly valued, this view was not found across the entire sample. Other foster carers in the interview sample were of the view that training went into too much depth, was repetitive at times and relied too much on the theoretical aspects of social pedagogy (n=14:25%). Three of these foster carers expressed frustrations that the courses did not sufficiently explore how to implement the approaches in practice, or take into account the complexities of their children's needs. While these foster carers were in the minority of those who participated in the evaluation, their experiences suggest that sites exploring introducing social pedagogy may benefit from supporting carers in not only understanding the principles of the

approach, but in implementing them as well. While many of the foster carers in the evaluation interview sample were highly positive about social pedagogy, the views of some (albeit a small number) in the interview sample suggest that the approach may not be appropriate for everyone.

Around a fifth of the foster carers in the interview sample reported that the programme enabled them to reflect on the influence that their personal and private experiences had on their own fostering (and parenting) (n=11:19%). Other foster carers in the interview sample reported reflection had reduced prolonged periods of stress, through providing frameworks by which they could critically assess challenging periods, to take account of personal feelings of guilt, while not being dictated to by them. Almost half of the foster carer survey respondents reported that meeting other foster carers and developing supportive peer networks to share ideas was the best thing about the Head, Heart, Hands programme (n=20:47%). Similarly, almost a quarter of the foster carers in the interview sample reported that aspects of the programme design had enabled them to develop supportive relationships with other foster carers (n=14:24%). The length of the Core Learning and Development course (eight days) and the experiential and interactive style were reported to have enabled foster carers in the same course cohort to get to know one another and to form bonds that had lasted until the end of the programme. Those foster carers who attended Head, Heart, Hands events following the Learning and Development courses, such as momentum groups, were able to continue to meet together to maintain those supportive relationships. However, it should be noted that other evaluation reports have highlighted that these groups were typically attended by the most enthusiastic of carers (Ghate and McDermid, 2016), suggesting once again that a 'virtuous cycle' may be at play.

A small number of foster carers who participated in the evaluation reported that Head, Heart, Hands had resulted in a greater awareness of communication being a two way process whereby one party communicates something and another party interprets it (n=9:16%). Seventy percent of the survey respondents (n=33) reported that there had been a 'great deal of positive change' in the way that they dealt with conflict or difficult situations. Nearly half of the foster carers interviewed reported that since attending the Head, Heart, Hands Learning and Development courses, they had become much less quick to react to circumstances as they arose (n=26:46%). A number of children and young people in the sample also described the positive impact that a calmer, less reactive approach had on their relationships with their foster carers and their own behaviours.

The highly positive perspective of those we interviewed may reflect the particular nature of the sample. Moreover, while only three foster carers could not identify any changes in practice since the commencement of Head, Heart, Hands, others were reticent to state that any changes in their practice were solely down to the programme (n=9:16%) and reported that it was difficult to separate the changes in approach from other contributing factors such as becoming more confident and experienced in fostering generally, or that they had simply got to know the children and young people better over the course of the evaluation timeframe.

The relationship between Head, Heart, Hands and the wider system

Two fifths of foster carers who took part in the interviews during Wave 3 (n=25:43%) reported that their relationship with supervising social workers had improved since Head, Heart, Hands, including three who reported that the relationship had been challenging at the start of the programme. Two thirds of the foster carer survey respondents reported that their relationship with their supervising social worker had improved 'a great deal' since attending the Head, Heart, Hands Learning and Development courses. Similarly, participating frontline children's social care staff from all of the sites reported that the programme had positively impacted on their relationship with foster carers in some way.

Participating foster carers and social workers alike reported that the delivery of the Learning and Development courses to foster carers and children's social care staff simultaneously had had a positive impact on relationships overall, and in particular where foster carers had completed the training with their supervising social worker. Almost a third of the foster carer survey respondents (n=13:30%) noted that the joint training approach provided them with opportunities to get to know children's social care staff and as a result feel more part of the team around the child. A number of foster carers and supervising social workers who participated in the evaluation reported that Head, Heart, Hands facilitated a shared approach and a shared language between foster carers and the social worker who supports them. Eleven of the foster carers who took part in interviews

at Wave 3 reported that they believed that their status among professionals had improved since Head, Heart, Hands, including two of those who had felt undervalued by their service previously.

A number of foster carers (n=8:14%) and frontline children's social care staff from all of the sites noted that more supervising social workers should have accessed the Learning and Development courses to ensure greater congruence between the approach used by the foster carers and the supervising social workers. Over a third of the foster carers interviewed reported that awareness and practice of social pedagogy among some children's social care staff, and those from other agencies was patchy at best (n=21:37%). Of particular note, were children's social workers, who were characterised by some of the foster carers who participated in an interview as unengaged with the programme and unsupportive of social pedagogic approaches. It is possible that the reported lack of engagement from some children's social care staff was a consequence of the programme design, which limited the number of places available to staff at the Core Learning and Development courses. Children's social care staff who participated in the evaluation from five sites noted that although they would have liked to have attended more of the Heart, Heart, Hands Learning and Development courses, workload and time constraints meant that this was not always possible, even if they wanted to. This was compounded by the high turnover of children's social workers. Three children and young people reported that they had frequent changes of social workers, with one reporting that she could not remember the name of her current worker because they changed so frequently. Indeed, the impact of frequent changes in social workers on the outcomes of children in care has been documented elsewhere (Hemmelgarn et al, 2006, Morgan 2006; Leeson 2007; McLeod 2007).

The lack of congruence of approach was particularly acute when foster carers experienced challenging periods such as in the case of allegations or placement disruptions, where foster carers reported that the way that the service had addressed those difficulties had been at odds with what they had learnt through Head, Heart, Hands. One area of particular frustration identified by a proportion of the foster carers who were interviewed at Wave 3 was the application of a more risk sensible approach. A small number of the foster carers who participated in an interview at Wave 3 (n=7:12%) reported that since Head, Heart, Hands, they were more likely to allow the children and young people to participate in activities that they previously would not have allowed them to do. However, the activities and decisions made by these foster carers with their children and young people had been over-ruled by their social worker in over half of these cases (n=4).

Placement purpose, patterns and experience

An exploration of the needs and circumstances of the sample of children and young people placed with Head, Heart, Hands carers highlighted a considerable degree of heterogeneity. Analysis of the length of Head, Heart, Hands placements highlighted a vast range in placement lengths and also high numbers of placements lasting for less than one month. In contrast, 22 placements lasted for more than five years and all started prior to the commencement of Head, Heart, Hands. There was variability both within and across sites in terms of the numbers of children who were placed with their Head, Heart, Hands carers at the commencement of the programme and those that moved into the placement following the completion of the Learning and Development Courses. There was also variability between the sites in terms of the number of placements that commenced prior to the Head, Heart, Hands Learning and Development courses and the number of children that were placed after the Learning and Development courses. There was a cohort of children who remained with their Head, Heart, Hands carers through to the end of the programme. The number of children who remained with their carers at the end of our data collection time period was small and ranged between four and 17 per site.

To understand more about the experience of Head, Heart, Hands and the impact of the Head, Heart, Hands episode for the children placed, case files were examined for indications of the nature of the relationship between the Head, Heart, Hands foster carers and the children and young people placed with them. Encouragingly, nearly two-third of cases were described in positive terms (64%), a minority were negative (10%) and the rest were described in mixed terms (25%). A total of 125 negative statements were identified in 79 cases. The most frequently cited was challenge in the placement relating to a variety of factors, which were indicated to have a detrimental impact on the fostering household relationship (n=70:28%).

The data suggest that the average number of placements experienced by the children in the sample was higher following placement with a Head, Heart, Hands carer when compared to the average number of placements prior to their Head, Heart, Hands episode. In addition, the average days per placement were lower after Head, Heart, Hands. The pattern that emerges is of a cohort of children within the sample of who experienced Head, Heart, Hands who had higher levels of instability prior to Head, Heart, Hands, compared to others who were placed with Head, Heart, Hands carers, and that these children also experienced higher levels of instability following Head, Heart, Hands. It should also be noted that these children tended to experience a shorter Head, Heart Hands episode compared to others in the sample. In this way, it is possible to question the extent to which these children might benefit from the social pedagogic practices, when only placed with Head, Heart, Hands carers for a short period of time. In light of the variable use of Head, Heart, Hands placements, and the heterogeneity of the sample of children and young people placed with them, a meaningful analysis of outcomes at an aggregate level is not viable because it would not be possible to directly attribute changes in outcomes to the Head, Heart, Hands care episode, especially for those children whose placement was particularly short.

The findings do indicate that in three of the four sites early signs of placement stability were detected towards the latter stages of the programme. Given the heterogeneity of the children and their care experience it would not be appropriate to attribute (at an aggregate level) placement (in)stability to the programme.

Seven foster carers interviewed reported that Head, Hands, including The Four Fs and Three Ps had provided them a framework by which they could reflect on placement disruptions. These foster carers reported feeling more able to recover from the emotional impact of those disruptions, to review what they could do differently next time, and crucially, relinquish themselves from a sense of sole responsibility for the placement breaking down as a result. There is some evidence in the case files of Head, Heart, Hands carers supporting children and young people with all aspects of their lives, including emotional wellbeing and educational support. As noted in previous chapters, a cohort of foster carers reported that since undertaking the Head, Heart, Hands Learning and Development courses they felt more confident in advocating for the needs of the children placed with them. This finding is corroborated in the case file analysis, which identified evidence of Head, Heart, Hands foster carers assisting with the referral process for additional support services, for example Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services.

The costs and value of Head, Heart, Hands

The core programme inputs for Head, Heart, Hands were identified to be: the Learning and Development courses; the embedding of trained Social Pedagogues and the provision of external support to sites. A unit cost for the Head, Heart, Hands programme has been estimated and ranged from £1,919 to £3,012, per annum for a fostering household. Variations in unit costs were attributable to a range of factors, these include: the different level of support provided to the sites by the SPC; the salary paid to the Social Pedagogues and also the number of foster carers that participated in the Head, Heart, Hands programme.

To explore the value of the programme, organisational and child level outcomes were examined to determine whether they could be directly attributed to the Head, Heart, Hands programme. It was evident that value for money analyses at an aggregate level mask the heterogeneity of the programme and as such are open to misinterpretation. Individual cost case studies provide some illustrative examples of potential costs avoided at a case level. However, there were also some cases where there was no evidence of costs avoided.

Head, Heart, Hands no longer exists in the form described in this report, although four of the seven sites had developed clear plans to continue with social pedagogy beyond the lifetime of the programme. To inform future debates about social pedagogic practice and whether it provides value for money, the potential cost inputs for future programmes have been estimated, along with key considerations for how the information can and should be interpreted.

Evaluation participants' views of the programme design

The initial Head, Heart, Hands core courses were identified by previous evaluation reports as a core component of the programme and for some it was the high point of the entire venture (Ghate and McDermid, 2016). The general consensus among the interview sample was that the experiential and participatory approach to learning was positive (n=13:23%) enabling foster carers to engage with the material and to get to know each other as a group. The sessions themselves were characterised as engaging and fun. Only two foster carers reported they did not enjoy this style of learning. One reported that they found the participatory methods 'uncomfortable', while the other reported that the reflective elements took up too much time which could have been dedicated to the material. Other foster carers in the interview sample were of the view that training went into too much depth, was repetitive at times and relied too much on the theoretical aspects of social pedagogy (n=14:25%). Three of these foster carers expressed frustrations that the courses did not sufficiently explore how to implement the approaches in practice, or take into account the complexities of their children's needs.

The majority of foster carers in the interview sample acknowledged that continuous learning of some kind was vital to ensure that they continued with the approach and were able to expand their understanding of social pedagogy (n=37:65%). Almost half of the foster carers in the evaluation interview sample attended one of the continuous learning groups at least once, and the majority found these helpful. Exploration of the implementation of Head, Heart, Hands, however found that small group work tended to start well but attendance weakened over time (Ghate and McDermid, 2016). The high proportion of foster carers in the evaluation interview sample who engaged in these activities, may suggest that the evaluation interview sample consisted of particularly engaged foster carers, who may not be typical of the wider foster carer population in the sites.

It is perhaps surprising that only a third of the foster carers (n=21:36) and six children and young people who were interviewed at Wave 3 mentioned the Social Pedagogues in their interviews. On the whole, those foster carers and children and young people who mentioned the Social Pedagogues in their interviews were complementary.

Implementation insights and their influence on the impact of the Head, Heart, Hands Programme

Alongside the modules of research designed to assess the final results of Head, Heart, Hands on carers and on young people (in other words, the impact of the programme), the evaluation of Head, Heart, Hands included a substantial module of longitudinal research on the implementation of the programme (Ghate and McDermid, 2016). This work was designed to describe how the programme was put into practice at site level, identify the core features of the programme as implemented, and evaluate the weaknesses and strengths that emerged over time in the implementation model and the implementation process⁶.

The research on the impact of the Head, Heart, Hands programme, like the implementation research, has revealed mixed results. The content was well-received: no-one argued with the principles and general ideas of social pedagogy. Aspects of the design were also well received in the impact research, with the Core Learning and Development courses in particular much praised and felt to have been well-delivered. But it is clear from the impact research, and is further illuminated by the implementation research, that the magnitude of disturbance of this programme, both at the level of foster carers, and at the level of sites and the wider system of care, was not as great as was originally hoped (Ghate and McDermid, 2016: 138-139). Social Pedagogues, though core components when viewed through an organisational lens, for example, appeared to be less prominent as change agents when viewed through the lens of individual carers, and of individual case files. There also remained a small but distinct group of foster carers who could not isolate how social pedagogic fostering was different to general good practice, and who were sceptical about its likely impact in their own practice even whilst endorsing the general values and principles. Staff in the implementation study made similar points and had similar reservations. It was also striking that over half the fostering case files made no mention of the programme or the fact that the family was taking part in it; and critically, most carers – even those who

⁶ Reports on the evaluation of Head, Heart, Hands that have been published to date are available at <http://www.lboro.ac.uk/research/ccfr/research/exploring/project---head-heart-hands.html>

were definitely enthused by social pedagogy – still felt by the end of the programme that the wider system within which they offered care to young people was not well-informed about social pedagogy and not always supportive to attempts to provide care that was social pedagogically informed. Of course, these types of effects take time to filter through a system; nevertheless, there was a sense in some sites that more had been hoped for in this regard.

It may be that the costs analysis, in its finding of the high spend on programme administration and process structures and activities, gives some deeper insight into the reasons for the limited reach and limited level of positive disturbance created by the programme as a whole. Combined with the insights from the implementation research, which noted that site project leads and pedagogues all spent substantial time on servicing the requirements of the central programme, there is a strong suggestion here that perhaps not enough of the substantial programme effort was deployed on 'front-line' development of social pedagogy; that is, in direct work and face to face contact with foster carers and with staff in the teams around foster children. It may also be, as we noted in the implementation research, that the decision to limit training to just 40 carers and around eight staff in each site was simply too small a number to have substantially and positively disturbed business as usual in the larger sites. Combined with the low level of matching achieved on the Head, Heart, Hands courses between carers and supervising social workers so that they could engage in co-learning (though very powerful, where it happened), the low levels of reach to other personnel in teams around the child (for example, children's social workers) meant that the three "points of the triangle" (the foster carers, supervising social worker and child's social worker) were not reached with equal effect, and the level of diffusion to the wider systems of care was low.

Conclusion

The analysis of the impact data suggests that Head, Heart, Hands enabled a small and particularly committed group of foster carers to make small changes which had a big impact on individual fostering households. The findings outlined in the evaluation are encouraging regarding the contribution that social pedagogy made to increasing the participating foster carers' knowledge of fostering practice and confidence. Participants in Wave 3 reported that they may not have dramatically changed *what they were doing* with the children and young people on a day to day basis, they were more **reflective, thoughtful and intentional** in their actions. In this way, Head, Heart, Hands was described by some foster carers in the interview sample as **enhancing to their practice**, enabling them to apply professional knowledge and skills as different circumstances arose. These foster carers were of the view that **putting labels on things they were already doing** was in itself helpful in making them more mindful of their existing behaviours. Two areas that were highlighted as benefitting from a more reflective approach were **communication** and **dealing with difficult situations and conflict**. A number of foster carers, who participated in interviews, reported that Head, Heart, Hands had assisted them to be more reflective about how they communicated with the child or young person they cared for.

Foster carers operate in a unique space between the professional and the personal: they have a 'professional' role in caring for some of the most vulnerable children within a regulated and structured organisational context of Children's Social Care, whilst offering a highly "personal" de facto family environment in which those children and young people can be nurtured. A small number of foster carers who took part in the interviews reported that they had been encouraged to share more personal information with their fostered children as a result of Head, Heart, Hands and **to use their personal relationship with the child to help them to grow and develop**. Models such as the Three Ps were reported to have assisted foster carers in establishing where the boundaries between the professional, personal and private might be for each individual child, and for each individual foster carer. The findings of this evaluation suggest that **social pedagogy may make a particular contribution to assist foster carers to navigate their way through this unique space of the professional and the personal**. In addition to the enhancement of foster carer practice outlined above, the emphasis placed on the use of self or "Haltung" within social pedagogy appeared to speak to those particular circumstances that foster carers find themselves in. Sites looking to introduce social pedagogy may wish to emphasise how this particular aspect of social pedagogy may make a unique contribution to the field of foster care.

These impacts may be further realised once more time has elapsed. our quantitative analysis highlighted the heterogeneity of the sample of children placed with Head, Heart, Hands carers and the variability in which the Head, Heart, Hands placements were being used. The variable length of the placement, with many of them being short term, resulted in complexities in attributing subsequent care placements, trajectories and outcomes to Head, Heart, Hands.

In light of the discussion above about the reach of the programme, the analysis suggests that the overall impact of the programme was deep rather than wide. A relatively small proportion of fostering households reported that the programme had reaped substantial benefits, but from the wider perspective these benefits are less evident from the quantitative or cost analyses.

Given the positive findings regarding the impact of Head, Heart, Hands on a proportion foster carers, the findings regarding the impact of the programme on the wider system are disappointing. Should a similar programme to introduce social pedagogic practices be undertaken greater attention must be paid to ensuring that greater diffusion of the approach is achieved. The core programme activities were primarily undertaken with foster carers. While work was carried out with social care staff, priority was given to foster carers on the Learning and Development Courses. Social care staff themselves noted that they would have like to have more opportunity to engage with the programme, but workload and other pressures made that difficult at times. In this way, foster carers were the primary "unit of influence" for the programme.

The significance of *enhancing* foster carers' practice should not be underplayed. Foster carers are a vital resource supporting countless vulnerable children and young people. The findings also suggest that aspects of social pedagogy may offer a unique contribution to assist foster carers in identifying and developing their distinctive role in the team around a child in foster care. However it was also clear that sites wishing to

introduce social pedagogy may benefit from exploring how the maximum number of foster carers might benefit from the most positive learning from the programme (including learning related to both its content and its design). They would also need to pay closer attention to ensuring that the systems are in place to support them and to ensure that children and young people placed in foster care are able to thrive and flourish.

Recommendations

Sites continuing with, or exploring the introduction of social pedagogy may wish to consider:

- How to reach the optimum proportion of team around the child personnel including foster carers and those who make decisions about the child's placement and pathways.
- Ways to ensure that all children's social care staff working with fostering households are aware and supportive of social pedagogic principles.
- A clear articulation of the unique contribution that social pedagogy could make to foster care and wider practice. It may be of benefit to explore the synergies between social pedagogy and existing practice, as well as emphasising the areas which may be enhanced through an adoption of the approach.
- Ways to reassure foster carers and others of the service's commitment to social pedagogy. It may also be of benefit to ensure that all parties have a realistic view of what might be achieved within a given time-frame.
- Sites who have participated in the programme may also benefit from ensuring that foster carers are aware of continuation and sustainability plans, to avoid unnecessary disengagement.
- That foster carers, and social care staff are proficient in not only understanding the principles of the approach, but in implementing them as well. An exploration of how different principles may translate into different circumstances may also be of benefit.
- To inform the value for money debates, it would be necessary to control some of the heterogeneity highlighted in this report in future similar programmes.

Sites exploring programmes to enhance practice for looked after children may benefit from:

- A clearly developed Theory of Change at the outset of the implementation of any new practice, or innovation with defined and measurable outcomes and associated indicators.
- The involvement of foster carers (and other recipients) with key aspects of programmes, including a contribution to training and giving presentations at awareness raising events. This may increase foster carers and others confidence in themselves, help to develop further skills, and reassure them of their value to the service.
- The development of programmes that include an element of co-learning between members of the team around the child.
- Opportunities for training and other programmes to facilitate peer support between foster carers.
- Explore how experiential and participatory methods might be introduced to training, while ensuring those with a more technical mindset are offered practical and implementable strategies and solutions.

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