

# Head, Heart, Hands

## social pedagogy stories



**HEAD**  
**HEART**  
**HANDS**

Introducing social pedagogy  
into foster care

The  
**Fostering  
Network**

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# Foreword

We know that foster carers do an amazing job and that a well-supported and trained foster care workforce is essential if we are to help children recover from early trauma and help them grow into healthy, happy adults. Social pedagogy is an approach that we now know adds to that support and training.

The Fostering Network is committed to innovative practice and promoting positive change within fostering that will provide children and young people in foster care with the opportunity to reach their full potential. We embarked on the Head, Heart, Hands demonstration programme in 2012. The aim of this programme was to test the application of social pedagogy in fostering services, with a view to improving outcomes for young people in foster care through the support and empowerment of those who care for them. The programme has been highly successful and we have seen clear benefits to young people, foster carers and fostering services within our demonstration sites. Feedback and experience from across the sites showed that children and young people, foster carers, social workers and members of the team around the child, and the wider service itself, all benefitted from exploring social pedagogy.

The Fostering Network is committed to the ongoing development of social pedagogy in foster care after the formal end of the Head, Heart, Hands programme both in the seven demonstration sites and more widely across the sector. We intend to embed elements of the approach, its core theories and learning from the programme into its support for its members. We will also look to support and influence national initiatives around social pedagogy.

I am delighted to present Social Pedagogy Stories, which illustrates some of the ways in which foster families have benefitted from introducing social pedagogy into their practice.

**Kevin Williams**  
**Chief Executive**  
**The Fostering Network**

# Introduction

Head, Heart, Hands is an innovative programme led by The Fostering Network and delivered in partnership with the Social Pedagogy Consortium (Jacaranda Recruitment Limited, ThemPra Social Pedagogy CIC and Professor Pat Petrie), working with seven fostering services across England and Scotland to explore the impact of social pedagogy on outcomes for children and young people in foster care.

Social pedagogy is a professional discipline used as the foundation for social care in much of continental Europe and Scandinavia. It combines theory, practice and professional training aimed at strengthening the development of children and young people with strong emphasis on the relationships they need around them. It puts foster carers at the heart of the child care team, and recognises the pivotal role they play in helping fostered children to build relationships that lead to stability, better outcomes in their future lives and long-term improvements to their wellbeing. In foster care, social pedagogy particularly supports the core concepts of delegated authority, a risk sensible approach and permanency. In practice, it is characterised by a balance of head (learning, applying knowledge, reflecting), heart (emotions, values) and hands (shared activity in sports, arts and creativity).

Throughout the Head, Heart, Hands programme, stories were submitted by the participating fostering services highlighting the ways they were using social pedagogy in their work to bring about positive change to the lives of children and young people and their foster carers and service staff. This booklet is a selection of just a few of these stories. We hope that reading them will leave you eager to learn more.

*All names have been changed to protect identities*

## Direct work with a foster family

### **Social pedagogue Bianca describes the methods she used in her work with a foster family, resulting in strengthened relationships and placement stability.**

I was invited by the supervising social worker to get involved in direct work with carers Jan and Sean who had attended the social pedagogy training. They wanted to have social pedagogic support to embed their learning in their practice. Jan and Sean were finding it difficult to manage and cope with their foster children's rivalry and frequent arguing over the last few months. We discussed and agreed on ways to address the issue of the difficult interactions between the siblings (Rita, eight years, and Kobi, seven years). The care plan for the children was adoption, so it was established as a short term placement while the children's social worker was actively looking for adoptive parents.

The meetings started by looking at the strategies the carers were already using that helped the children to express or manage their emotions (meditation CDs at night, one-to-one conversations with each child). They also thoroughly explored the strengths and needs of each member of the family, and those of the family as a whole. We used in **reflection** the **Diamond Model** (Eichsteller & Holthoff, 2012).

This reflection helped Jan to develop self-awareness and a deeper understanding of how the children were communicating their needs through their behaviour. One example was an experience when the children were arguing and Jan reacted by inviting them to say what they need from each other. She was impressed with how the children engaged and expressed themselves:

What does Rita need from Kobi?

Kindness, love, to play with me, respect, to listen, happiness, him not to copy me.

What does Kobi needs from Rita?

Love, listen, kindness, I want to play with her.

This experience encouraged Jan to find creative ways to improve communication with the children:

**“** *After some training with the social pedagogue I felt that I would try something out with the children. I got each of them to write 'what does Jan do that I like, appreciate and make me grateful for' in a circle in the middle of a page then round the outside write anything they could think of. I did exactly the same thing for each of them. When we had finished we shared our information and were able to really understand what each of us meant to the other. I have now put my 'what does Kobi/Rita do that I like, appreciate and make me grateful for' sheets on their bedroom walls as a reminder of all the things I appreciate'.*  
**Foster carer Jan.**

Jan and I thought about using a **Common Third** (Lihme, 1988) activity with the whole family for creating a safe space to express and raise awareness about what each member of the family needs in relation to the others. In this case the idea was to help communication within the family by encouraging expression through a shared creative activity.

Using different ways of expression (writing or drawing) everyone engaged and shared their thoughts and feelings.

The reflection acknowledged the impact on the children of the lack of a systemic approach by the local authority (information was passed to the children without involving the carers) and the anxieties and stress this caused in the children, in turn affecting the family's day to day life.

During the process of the social pedagogic intervention the local authority decided to look for a long term placement for the children, asking Jan and Sean if they would like to be considered.

This had a big impact on the family's expectations around the placement, and reflection using the **Four Fs** (Greenaway, 1992) social pedagogy model facilitated both a wider understanding of the situation and the exploration of feelings around the possibility of becoming long-term carers.

## Immediate outcomes and longer term impact

Jan and Sean decided to put themselves forward for being considered as a long term placement for the children. The plan developed during reflection on how they envisaged the future of the placement.

“ *The carers have recently put themselves forward as a long term placement for the children and the social pedagogue will be looking at doing some work with the family on their expectations. She will also be working with the carers' birth child looking at how the placement dynamics impact on her and her feelings around this.*

*There is no doubt in my mind that her work with this family has really helped them to work in a more reflective way and thus give better care to the children placed with them'.*

**Supervising social worker**

The systemic aspect of social pedagogic intervention is part of the reflection process, encouraging the carers to see how the whole system and context around the children has an impact on their lives. Social pedagogues can bring a systemic perspective to the team by working collaboratively with the supervising social worker, maintaining open channels of communication at all times.

The approach was changed from an individualistic approach (focused on the behaviour by analysing action-reaction responses to certain stimuli), to a more systemic and holistic view of the child. This approach emphasises understanding the whole system and the underlying aspects of behaviours. It puts challenges into a wider context and opens opportunities for developing new practice.

**Reflective practice** is a keystone in social pedagogy practice; it gives carers opportunities to reflect on their experience of implementing their learning in their fostering practice.

The holistic approach facilitates the understanding of children's behaviours with a different perspective, where more complex and contextualised aspects of the child's life are considered.

The **Common Third** (Lihme, 1988) activity was used for relationship building and improving communication. As a result this has had an impact on the stability of the placement and provided a more dynamic way of working in the team around the child. Besides improved relationships in the fostering household, the children are becoming empowered to express themselves and how they feel more openly.

# Reflecting on communication

## **Foster carer Justine explains how the reflective methods she learned in her social pedagogy training made a difference to her foster child.**

I have been fostering for seven years. I have fostered twelve children and attended lots of training courses and was keen to learn about social pedagogy, but at first I struggled to understand it. I like strategies and at first I felt that the social pedagogues seemed a little vague when asked for clear examples, but I am so glad I was included in the programme.

Social pedagogy is not a quick fix for problems, it is more of a journey which helps people understand more about themselves, to be more observant and reflective, and be inventive when trying to problem-solve. I have been lucky enough to work with five or six social pedagogues and each one has made me feel good about myself and given me the impression that they are really interested in what I have to say. Imagine if as foster carers we can do the same for our children every day.

When you look at examples in which the fostering system has failed children, for example in the Baby P case, there are nearly always defensive comments from people such as "I told them but they didn't listen". But in social pedagogy, we are encouraged to consider our communication with people and not to just think "I told them" but to think "I might have told them but did they understand my message. Was I clear enough? Were they really listening?" and if not, to reflect on how I could deliver the message in a better way and make sure I am listened to. I don't ever want a child to suffer because "I told them but they didn't listen". I now make sure my message is clear and fully understood and will ask for justification if my opinions aren't listened to.

There are three main areas where I feel social pedagogy has helped me in my role as a foster carer:

1. How I deal with professionals. It has given me more confidence to advocate for the children and to ensure that I am fully understood.
2. How I deal with children. To be more aware of things I might have done instinctively and to reflect on whether it actually works or whether to try something else.
3. Lastly I use it with older children by explaining some of the tools to them and encouraging them to use them.

I could give you countless examples of each area but I will just give you one example of how it has helped improve the outcomes for a foster child.

I have recently moved two children on to adoption. They were with me for 13 months and when they arrived, the toddler had been so severely abused I was told she could easily have been killed by her abuser. She had withdrawn so much that she was almost comatose.

I will never forget the first time I changed her nappy; she lay totally still and silent but with huge tears running down the sides of her face. While with me, she gradually came out of her shell and became a confident and bubbly little girl, but there were still triggers which could send her back to the dark place she was in when she first arrived. She was extremely scared of certain men, particularly those with dark hair, with beards or wearing hats. She would run to me for me to pick her up and would hide her face, shaking, until they had moved away.

During the 13 months she was with me, I got to know her and responded to her and could see at a glance when she needed my support. Her new mum and dad had to learn this in the two week transition period and I was so scared they wouldn't understand her or notice when she was withdrawing. The first time they met her, it went really well until they were leaving and the

dad took a hat out of his pocket. As soon as she saw it she ran into the other room. I told him that he couldn't put the hat on and explained why; he complied but when he left said "I don't want to scare her but will have to put it on if it snows as my head gets very cold".

I reflected on that in the evening and knew that he hadn't understood just how major a problem this was for her; so when they came back the next morning, I sat them down and explained that I felt they hadn't fully understood the message I was trying to give them. I said that, in my opinion, when she saw a man in a hat, she was actually picturing her abuser. Her dad cried at the thought that he could remind her of that, but then started asking me how they might be able to help her overcome her fear. We came up with a few possible suggestions.

The next day, it was snowing and the dad came in shivering with no hat on and I knew then that he had fully understood her fear. At that moment I stopped worrying about her moving on from me, as I knew that they would be watching out for triggers and would be there for her. I know they are caring people and would probably have noticed her reaction themselves eventually, but social pedagogy helped me ensure they really understood my message and saved my foster child from having to go back to that dark place while her mum and dad got to know her better.

# Using reflection in supervision

## **Patrick, a foster carer, describes how he used reflective practice to help his foster son reach his potential.**

My partner and I were wondering how to motivate our 15-year-old foster son to take his studies seriously and fulfil his potential in this vital year 11. He is predicted to pass 10 subjects at C or above but we think with a bit more work he could achieve all Bs and some As or even A\*s. We have five months to go!

Although he is quite motivated and wants to move to a sixth form with an entry criteria of seven Bs, he seems to do just enough to get by rather than pushing himself to achieve more. He has also started dating a girl for the first time and seems more interested than ever in going out – perfect timing!

We used supervision to reflect on this and looked at our own upbringing, examining our family scripts around education and achievement. We had different motivations to achieve from our family scripts. My mother particularly wanted me to go to university as she had been denied the chance by her own father – he had said it would be ‘wasted on a girl’. My partner’s father wanted him to go to university as it had made a big difference to his life – moving from an impoverished to a comfortable lifestyle.

This led us to reflect on why we wanted our foster son to do well. We both felt that it was part of our responsibility as foster carers. We want him to do as well as possible for his own future. It is also about breaking a cycle and showing that children in the care system can achieve. Our supervisor was surprised that we would feel we had failed and that she might criticise us if our children didn’t fulfil their potential. She pointed out that it is also the children’s responsibility to work for their exams. It is not all on our shoulders.

This discussion helped us to relax a bit and make sure we are encouraging rather than pressurising our foster son. We also thought of ways of making him take responsibility such as devising a revision timetable ahead of his mocks, rather than us nagging him every day. We were also worried that he wouldn’t get around to filling in the application form for the new sixth form but decided to lay off nagging unless he was about to miss the deadline. Miraculously, it was completed this weekend, three weeks ahead of schedule – he can take responsibility when he wants to!

We have agreed some boundaries around socialising in the run up to exams. We have said he can go to one party per weekend but has to be home by 10.30pm as he needs his sleep. He can also only go out on the weekends once he has done his homework or revision for that day, rather than letting him put it off to Sunday evenings. It’s a tussle between his sense of responsibility and ambition and ours but hopefully we are striking the right balance.

# The art of losing control

**This story illustrates the empowering of a foster carer, George, to let go of control so that his foster daughter is liberated to make her own choices.**

“ *When you teach a child something you take away forever his chance of discovering it for himself.*

Jean Piaget

We had a difficult time with our foster daughter a while ago and many of her decisions had been hurtful not only to herself but to others in the network of people around her. She was increasingly in trouble at school and it would all come out at home in one way or another. To counter this I would be heavily involved with trying to stop her getting into trouble and telling her the way that things should be. This created rising tension but I could not see a way of getting her to do as she was told. She and I were getting more and more frustrated as we could not get what we wanted but neither of us would back down.

Considering these actions I have adopted a **critical reflection** approach recently (encouraged by social pedagogy) to look at my own reactions to these situations and how I have been dealing with them. I found through these reflections that many of my actions were pre-emptive and controlling and that many times (often through the best intentions) I gave very definite guidelines to our foster daughter that were unnecessary and more about my own feelings of safety than hers.

As a result my reflections gently pointed me to the fact that maybe she was being over controlled and was kicking back against that. The quote above by Jean Piaget has been a guide for me recently and become more of a pedagogic mantra. Our daughter had to explore, make mistakes and learn this world in her own way. At times it may have been appropriate to take control but actually it is so much more important that she realised that she needed to ask for help rather than it being imposed. In taking my foot off the gas and letting her make her own choices the trouble did not stop but she was allowed to fully own her own choices and the consequences that they brought.

These reflections have challenged me about my legacy as a foster carer. Control can lead to my creation of unrealistic and unhealthy ideals. It is easy to project feelings and standards that are entirely about me. Projections of what it is to succeed in life, what 'good' people look like and last but not least, creating an environment that the child can feel unsafe in because they have no idea how to meet these standards. Often control just gets me the life that I want and can often be a million miles from what is best for the child or their environment. How do I make sure that I do not project these feelings constantly? Without a doubt it is continued critical reflection, a realisation that these feelings were often projected onto me when I was growing up and a will to break the cycle of manhandling a child's upbringing. Although it will always be a problem as I want to project and protect my own worldview and security, I think all of these insights are a good start to letting go of my own insecurities and allowing a child, a person in their own right, to choose whether to go left or right.

Since this story was written our foster daughter has had to leave us for other reasons. Through some careful work she was able to be placed in the vicinity so that she could continue to attend the same school and be around the same network of people that she knows. On a Sunday our church meets in the school and our foster daughter would normally have come with us but we did not expect to see her there once she moved. A couple of months after she had left I was

standing chatting to a friend when some arms came up and hugged me from behind. I turned and there she was! We chatted for a while and caught up. She was relaxed and friendly. She then pulled a school report card out of her pocket to show me she was still getting into some trouble but she was generally doing ok. We had a talk about the card and about still getting into trouble and we both groaned and laughed. She left with another hug. I thought about how, if I had controlled her to the extent that I would have without reflection, I would simply have made an enemy. Now however, even though she does not live with me, I am a positive part of a young lady's life who is just trying to find her way.

# Head , heart and hand reflection

**Supervising social worker Anya, who has a qualification in social pedagogy, used a creative approach in her carer supervision, providing a structure to reflect on a complex situation with the foster carer.**

I started to work with Marco because he was struggling with his future plans regarding work and his commitment to fostering. Prior to my involvement he had had two consecutive placements, which had been brought to a planned end, as he felt he could not meet their long-term needs. Subsequently, he questioned his own ability to continue fostering. Being a single carer, he also wondered if fostering was the right career, given that unpredictable changes often resulted in a loss of financial security.

Since his last foster child had moved on, Marco had provided respite care for several young people until another suitable placement could be found. On two occasions, different young people had been linked to him but placements did not start because of changes in the children's circumstances.

Marco seemed to be experiencing mixed feelings of failure, loss, uncertainty and confusion. He wanted to be a full time carer, but also felt that he needed the security of a regular job to have a secure income. He seemed torn, not certain what his priorities were. It was necessary to clarify his situation in order to support him and move forward with a plan that he felt comfortable with.

We had five meetings over the period of a month. There was a need for Marco to **reflect** on past fostering experiences, including successes and disappointments. We first created a 'mind map' together, reflecting on his current situation, including his work, people in his life, young people previously placed with him whom he continued to befriend. Building a 'map' of his current life and work circumstances revealed that there were unresolved issues from past placements, as well as the feeling that people might think he is not a capable carer. There was also confusion for Marco when it came to understanding the different fostering provisions and expectations towards each of them. He felt in the past he was not supported enough.

I set up a meeting with our new team leader to make introductions. We used that meeting as an opportunity for Marco to talk through past events and to explain his feelings. He was reassured that nobody within the department doubted his abilities, which he found very comforting. We both emphasised that this was a new start. We also identified together the topics that we should work on: his expectations versus the expectations of the service; the need to "unhook" from old placements, clarification of possible future placements, and finding the balance between foster placements and his finances and work commitments.

In following meetings I used images of a head, heart and hand to reflect with Marco. Into the head we wrote all things going on in his head: thoughts, and things he thinks he needs to do. Into the heart we wrote all things he wanted from his heart: wishes and feelings, whether realistic or not. Into the hand we wrote all practical considerations, such as what he could realistically and pragmatically do in his everyday life - what is possible and what can physically be done.

With this reflection on Marco's "head, heart and hands", we managed to separate his feelings from facts and to clarify many things.

## HEAD

This is where Marco felt “stuck”. He felt that facts don’t add up, he reflected again on inconsistencies experienced, for example in regards to payment situations. This allowed us to discuss the facts and requirements for different kinds of fostering, for example that the service expects specialist carers to be there twenty-four hours a day for the child while mainstream carers can have a job alongside fostering.

## HEART

We discussed past experiences and feelings, including Marco’s thoughts around how people see him and if he is seen as having the skills to be a specialist carer. I clarified his questions around how the council places children and together we looked at possible placements. Marco discovered his struggle between his heart and his head and asked me to support him with this.

He spoke about sometimes feeling excluded, for example at carer groups, because he felt less successful at being a carer. He stated that he also realised he is still suffering from trauma around the end of a previous placement, and that he still felt that this needs to be “sorted out”. He was able to say that he is not sure about the intensity of a specialist placement and feels that maybe with two younger mainstream children, possibly siblings, he would have a better link into the local community and that this could work with him working part time. He stated that he realised he is a heart-led person.

## HANDS

We reflected on the practical adjustments Marco has made in his life for fostering (for example, house move and change of jobs) and discussed practical requirements, such as the need to pay the rent to his house, his salary and financial situation. We realised that what is feasible for him from a financial perspective would be to reduce his job to be a part time job and have a mainstream placement (ideally a sibling pair) as a foster placement. We spoke about practical considerations such as time frames for placement planning, or for him to give notice to go part time at work.

He accepted and requested my support as a supervising social worker, especially helping him to not only be heart-led. I was able to clarify a lot of existing situations with him by setting up meetings with relevant people and was able to gain clarity for him, for example around his role with a previous foster child.

Marco felt that he was able to let things go and also felt better informed about his possibilities. Together we agreed on how to proceed, which made him feel involved in processes, rather than others making decisions.

Six months after those discussions and reflections took place, Marco has gone part time at work and has two young brothers placed with him. He feels confident in his work and has gained back joy in his work as a foster carer, with the opportunity to stay in his job and not lose his contacts there. He now engages with the service again and makes good use of the support offered to him, such as my home visits, and is open to reflection. He felt that the head, heart and hand reflection made his strengths and weaknesses visible to himself, helped him to clarify misunderstandings and also helped him to let go of past experiences. The long-term impact for him is that he is back into fostering and highly motivated, whereas he had previously felt misunderstood and considered giving up fostering.

Additionally, other team members found the reflection tool useful and implemented the model into their carer supervisions. It has helped the team to think more creatively around reflection and carer supervision.

The creative approach was something completely new for Marco, and helped him to reflect in a different way. The visual reflection supported his style of learning and reflection, and helped him to sort his thoughts and feelings. This open and intensive reflection was only possible as I had built up a good working relationship with him. We focussed on his strengths rather than his weaknesses in order to make future plans. Placement planning was done together - I involved Marco in all stages of the planning of his future placement, so he felt included and took on responsibility. Feelings of failure from past placements were dealt with in a restorative way, which helped to heal old wounds but also made clear to him that he had to let go and that it was fine to do so.

# Outdoor activities with foster families and looked after children

**Anita, a social pedagogue, reports on activity days for foster families that utilise social pedagogic principles to enable relationship building, learning of skills, overcoming of fears and reflection.**

The activity days at the outdoor learning centres are open to all foster carers, their birth children, the children and young people they look after and social work staff. The main aim is to offer a structured initiative where the participants can enjoy quality time together. A safe and fun space is provided for nurturing, building and improving relationships, learning new skills, experiencing challenges, conquering fears, developing team-work and networking with others through shared outdoor activities.

The participants have been diverse, ranging from toddlers to sibling groups and young people, to foster carers with years of experience, single carers and respite carers (attending with the child for whom they provide respite care). Since the activities started, a few supervising social workers and family support workers from the fostering team have participated alongside the foster carers or the children and young people they are working with.

There have been three courses so far, each lasting three days. Each day consists of a 3-4 hour outdoor activity – ranging from team tasks, high ropes, wall climbing, woodland skills (den building and campfire lighting) and bell boating - followed by a shared meal, free play and space for conversation and reflection about the day's experiences. This includes an appraisal exercise, where each participant's skills, competency and bravery throughout the outdoor activity are acknowledged.

It is widely recognised that both children and adults benefit greatly from being in contact with nature – the open space, natural light and tranquillity often associated with outdoor spaces like woods, lakes and fields allow relaxation, play and exploration to take place.

It was one of the main aims for the outdoor days to create opportunities where both adults and children could learn new things and achieve a shared goal together by working as a team (**Common Third**, Lihme, 1988); as well as networking with other carers and young people.

Children and carers explored the different activities safely, guided by the outdoor facilitators, who encouraged, helped and patiently took each participant at their own pace. By sharing the same outdoor activity and by accepting and embracing each person's life experiences and knowledge, the participants had the opportunity to experience each other's **lifeworld orientations** (Thiersch, 2005) while sharing a common life space.

These days illustrate both Senninger's **Learning Zone** (2000) model and Vygotsky's **Zone of Proximal Development** (1978) theory by presenting safe spaces for children and carers to overcome certain fears and giving them the time and space to experiment by going a little out of their comfort zone, sometimes with the help and support of others or by slowly challenging their own limits. For example, a 12 year old girl took the courage to walk up a very steep pole backwards; while an older teenager needed to take some extra time until she felt comfortable enough to join the group on the climbing wall.

The activities also offered the opportunity for the discovery and development for both children and foster carers of skills, competencies and talents that they weren't aware of or that they hadn't had the opportunity to demonstrate before (for example, being good at climbing or

enjoying being in a group of similar people); which can be connected with Luft & Ingham's **Johari Window** (1955) tool.

The shared meals and free play supported children and young people to develop their social skills and capacity to make friends, playing fairly and agreeing collectively on rules and limits for their games without the input from adults. For the foster carers, the time after the meals provided not only a space to share fostering experiences and tips, but also to reflect together on feelings, thoughts and situations, using Kolb's **Experiential Learning theory** (1984).

Below are some of the benefits of these activities as expressed by some of the foster carers who took part:

“ *'My favourite moment was building the outdoor shelter – not because our shelter was in any way weatherproof (it wasn't!) but because we had to work as equals in the task, agree our design and implement it all in a short space of time. Both children felt a real sense of achievement in learning to start a fire without matches or other accelerants.'*

**Foster carer**

“ *'This represented a great opportunity for real coming together in a fantastic space to spend real quality time working together without even realising the added benefits the activity was bringing to your relationship. This is a classic example of social pedagogy at its best: taking time to encourage, empathise and go at each other's pace, achieving together and bringing that Common Third (Lihme, 1988) element completely into play.'*

**Foster carer**

“ *'The outing was booked as much for me as for my foster child Becky as I enjoy such activities, but she doesn't - or at least thinks she doesn't - until she is encouraged to challenge herself. We had a lot of trepidation at the beginning with Becky determined that she wasn't going to give it a try because of her fear of heights. Thus it was with some relief when we spoke to another foster carer, who also admitted he was scared of heights but determined to have a go. This gave her the motivation and encouragement to have a go and by the second challenge, she not only completed it successfully but was probably the only person who ended up choosing to walk backwards up a very slippery log because she knew from gymnastics she could do it that way! A great day out and one we hope to build on as helping Becky overcome her fears takes many small steps. She took a giant leap forward in building her confidence today.'*

**Foster carer**

“ *'It's unusual to get something where we can all work together as a team. It really helped strengthen the bond between us as well as helping to try new and exciting things in a safe place. It was a great way to help us to continue to make those connections.'*

**Foster carer**

“ *'Daniel loved being able to help me and working together as a team. The event has strengthened our relationship and given Daniel a lifelong memory.'*

**Foster carer**

# Placement beginnings and endings

**Fernanda, a social pedagogically trained supervising social worker, describes the methods used in ensuring a placement move resulted in a positive ending for a child.**

Two children from a sibling group of three were to be moved from a short-term placement into a long-term and permanent placement. The sibling group consists of Paul, 13 years old (already in a permanent foster placement), Richard, 11 years old and Caroline, 7 years old. Richard and Caroline were placed together in short-term fostering. The family finder had been trying to identify a placement for over a year for both siblings. Richard's behaviour started to escalate over the year, with his anxiety heightening about not knowing what was happening. Because of his behaviour the specialist teams were approached, and carers were identified for both children.

Caroline was to move in with Paul. The carer had come forward to take all three children, however taking into account Richard's behaviour it was felt that this was not appropriate as she was a single carer. It was also felt that Richard would benefit from a placement on his own where he could be the youngest child in the family, and where there was a big sense of community. Considering both of the available placements, it was decided that Caroline would move in with Paul, and Richard would live with other carers.

At a meeting key aspects were considered, discussed and debated: Richard's routine, the school's routine, the support in place for Richard at school, what he used to comfort him (a sensory box), the strategies used by school to de-escalate his behaviour. A HOTS (Hospital and Outreach Teaching Service) worker would start working with Richard, preparing him for what was going to happen. She would start by addressing Richard's worries about the future and the present. Several agreements were made between various professionals and the foster carers.

It was agreed that there should be a common script so that all three children were getting the same message. The social worker was tasked with writing a clear script of what was happening and why decisions were made in this way. This way all carers and professionals involved with the children would be repeating the same message, allowing the children to take it in and accept it without feeling confused.

Both new carers were to provide a "talking photo album" for each child, which was to contain pictures of their new home, their bedrooms, their new schools, their new families, parks nearby and would have recordings of their carers' voices. If possible, a carer's scarf or a smell they could associate to the carer would also be placed in the album. It was considered vital that a picture of all three siblings was placed at the end of the album, reiterating that they would still be seeing each other. Richard's carers had also prepared their own portfolio, where they said a few things about themselves. Since Richard did not know them at all it was felt there should be more than just a photo album. The carers also provided a loose photograph of themselves so the children could take this to school should they feel they wanted to share the news with their friends.

It was felt that the social worker should inform both Richard and Caroline of what was happening. The decision was made that the children would be told separately - it was felt that due to Richard's behaviour and the assessment that had been carried out, he needed to feel he was a priority. Following the recommendations from the assessment, it was agreed that the social worker would speak to Richard first, explain everything as was in the script, give him the portfolio as well as the photo album and allow him to ask questions. She would then speak to Caroline after having spoken to Richard. This went well.

It was essential for the children to have a good ending to their placement and to school. The school was asked to do a send-off for both children and the last day of school was selected. Both Richard and Caroline got a book from school that their teachers wrote in and all their friends left a message, as well as contact details. They both had a farewell party. Meetings with old and new schools were set up so that all information around the children could be shared. Richard took his farewell book to the new school which made him feel valued and important.

To enable the placement to end on a positive note, carers were asked to take the children out for the day and mark the ending with them. All of the family members that had been part of their lives also came over and said their farewells.

Dates for introductions and initial contact were established. The previous foster carers visited both children at their new homes once they had been there for over a week. This was very important, enabling them to experience a closure to their previous placement.

It was agreed that contact between siblings would happen more than once a month - not overnight, because all siblings would need to settle and adapt to their new realities. Carers were on board with this and the children have visited each other. Paul and Caroline have been to Richard's home, which has lessened Paul's anxieties around Richard not being with him and Caroline. Contact is agreed between carers and will take place every two weeks. They will go out for tea or meet at each other's homes. Paul and Richard go ice skating together.

Richard continues to contact his previous carers once a week; he misses them and enjoys a chat. He also speaks to their grandchildren, with whom he spent a lot of time. He is also allowed to contact his siblings when he wants to and he contacts some friends from his old school. He is very much looking forward to having them over for a weekend.

## Immediate outcomes

Richard responded very positively to the talking photo album - he wanted to have it with him all the time. Caroline also responded to it well and memorised all the information, feeding this back to her new carer. Richard was very happy with his album and took his own album to his first contact with his new foster carers to show them his pictures. The process worked very well with all of the children. Richard feels settled and has made friends around the community and has started at his new school, currently with no additional support needed. He has used his leaving book from school to contact his friends from his old school. The carers have encouraged this and he is able to keep in touch with them. He was delighted when his friends returned his calls. This has reinstated his feeling of belonging, of being loved, and part of the community. This has really helped with his confidence. He feels at home and says that it feels like he has lived there for years. He feels able to call his siblings should he want to and has asked to contact his previous carers and to see them. At the moment phone contact is maintained once a week. Richard also sent them a card to thank them for everything and has also received a card from their grandson. He holds on to anything that he feels demonstrates how much he is loved, so he has cherished this card and taken it to school.

## Longer-term impact

Richard has stabilised at school, and is currently not requiring any additional support. His anxieties are contained within the placement. As yet he has not kicked off in any way. We hope this has impacted in how foster carers see him, building on the positive information and behaviour, so they are able to see him in a different light than if he was escalating in his behaviour. We hope these small but important details will create firm foundations for Richard in his placement and that this will be a placement until adulthood.

Building a relationship and focusing on it is clearly illustrated with the talking photo album and introductions and processes of meeting the carers before moving in. Also, the importance of the relationship with his previous carers is clearly valued, as they still keep in contact and a key point in the initial phases of the placement was for the previous foster carers to visit Richard in his new home. The relationship building and maintaining old and new relationships is crucial, as this will enable Richard to behave as he has seen **role modelled**, for example keeping in touch with his friends from his old school while still building new relationships in his new school and neighbourhood.

The creative approach was also used with foster carers, using a talking photo album for the first time and for school, creating a send-off book and a sending off party for both children.

After Richard had settled, I did some **reflection** with the foster carers about the value of the work that was undertaken by all carers, with travelling and meeting the children at different points of the introductions. The foster carers had not previously had a similar experience, as children had been placed from one day to the next because of placement breakdowns or respite.

I feel it is crucial for children to have positive endings. Even when things are difficult, as they were for Richard in his placement, he was able to leave the placement on a positive note and still continue a link with his previous foster carers. There should be events where endings are marked in a positive light, this helps children move on and allows them to feel they are able to accept the change.

It is also very important for past and present relationships to be nurtured and correctly role modelled, as many children who are accommodated have not had positive experiences with these situations.

## Providing a positive experience

**This social pedagogue, Jose, supported young people during a coasteering activity and describes the strategies used that made a difference to a child, enabling a positive experience.**

At the beginning of the activity Chloe was quite frightened. She told me she hadn't been swimming in the sea before and is not a confident swimmer in the pool either. She had only paddled in the sea before. I supported her using the steps you would with a younger child going into the water for the first time. I held both of her hands and helped her in the water step by step. We then took time to explore the water, getting used to it. She had a few tears streaming down her cheek and held on to me at all times. With small steps we have achieved stepping on to the rocks, going into the water and swimming through the channel. To start with, every step of the way she was saying she couldn't do it, however things changed throughout the process.

She began to trust me and the instructors, followed our instructions and did not give up. She tried all aspects of the activity. I encouraged her to try to jump as the others did in an area with conditions similar to a swimming pool. She had an option to go in sliding down but chose to try jumping. I waited for her in the sea and held her when she got out of the water. She held me very tight, cried and kept on repeating that she did not like it. The sea tasted different to swimming pool water.

After being reassured she calmed down and continued with the activity. After going through the tunnel in the water it was time to climb on the rock in the middle of the sea. I started to notice the difference in her attitude after the jump and at this moment. I spoke to her about her strengths in everyday life and how she gets through the challenges and uncertainty. After that I felt she became more adamant as she decided to climb on to the rock without assistance, no longer saying that she couldn't do things and started to enjoy herself by smiling and interacting more with the other two young people in the group. She checked how they were doing and wanted to help them and me if we jumped into the water and she waited on the rocks to help us climb back up. The session carried on for another hour with Chloe taking on challenges, smiling, still needing a little support and holding on to me but also trying out things by herself.

I noticed she needed teaching how to walk on and climb off rocks as she hadn't done anything similar before. I explained to her how to place her feet to get a good grip, how to fall to not get hurt (or get hurt less), and how to slide off the rock with an awareness of the environment around her. She struggled walking uphill when the grass was slippery so I advised her on how she could overcome it using different techniques.

By the end of the session Chloe did not want to leave. She wanted to go back into the water (which was a huge contrast to the beginning of the activity) and also extended the distance between myself and the instructor. She refused our help to get her to the beach and wanted to do it herself. She took a while, but I felt it was important to follow that through as it was something she wanted to achieve by herself. She did so and was happy, laughing and smiling as well as asking about future activities.

I observed a big change from the beginning of the activity to the end. She had worked on her physical skills, her confidence, how to approach a challenge, resilience and coping with stress, asking for help, cooperating with others and being a part of the team. She said that she had a good time and she was happy when she left.

# Key tools and concepts in social pedagogy

The **Common Third** (Lihme, 1988) relates to a shared activity that is purposefully chosen by thinking about what might be an activity of interest to both carer and child and will provide an opportunity to build the relationship. Often the common third activity will be an opportunity to learn together and will typically involve creativity and fun. It can however be as simple as washing up together and purposefully using the time for dialogue. The common third emphasises the social pedagogic value of equality (working together, not being 'done to'), and the concepts of being authentic and reflective, and building positive experiences.

**Critical reflection** is central to social pedagogy, as social pedagogy places great importance on understanding the clients' situation and life-world. The practitioner is more likely to gain this understanding if he or she can reflect on their own life, their own practice and how these often directly or indirectly play a part in the client's life.

The **Diamond Model** (Eichsteller & Holthoff, 2012) symbolises one of the most fundamental underpinning principles of social pedagogy – that there is a diamond within all of us. As human beings we are all precious and have a rich variety of knowledge, skills and abilities. Not all diamonds are polished and sparkly, but all have the potential to be. Similarly, every person has the potential to shine out – and social pedagogy is about supporting them in this. Therefore, social pedagogy has four core aims that are closely linked: well-being and happiness, holistic learning, relationships and empowerment.

The **Experiential Learning Theory** (Kolb, 1984) describes learning through experience. The learner must reflect on the experience to apply their learning to new situations.

The **Four Fs** (Greenaway, 1992) is a model of reflection, used for reflecting on a situation or event looking in turn at facts (what has happened), feelings (what are the feelings associated with the events), findings (what has been learned) and futures (what can be done differently next time).

The **Johari Window** (Luft & Ingham, 1955) is a tool used to develop self-awareness, interpersonal relationships and communication.

The **Learning Zone** model (Senninger, 2000) helps people to understand what conditions are needed for learning. It describes three zones in which an individual can be in: The Comfort Zone: Our safe haven, a place we are familiar with, for action and reflection. Here, we don't have to take risks and can learn little. The Learning Zone: In order to expand our Comfort Zone we need to enter the Learning Zone. This is where we make new discoveries about ourselves, other people and the world. Here we feel we are at the edge of our abilities and limits. And finally the Panic Zone: An area of experience where little or no learning can take place. But, because learning increases as we approach the Panic Zone, we should aim to get close to it, but not enter it.

The concept of the **lifeworld orientation** (Thiersch, 2005) describes taking a holistic view of children and young people and their **lifeworld** as they experience it – to walk in their shoes. It is important to understand how the individual interprets what goes on in their life, and their sense of agency to influence what happens. Equally, we need to be aware of how our own lifeworld influences us, and perhaps leads us to make assumptions about others which may or may not reflect their lifeworld.

**Role modelling** refers both to the highly valued role modelling of practice and ways of working which the social pedagogues bring from their professional training and experience, and also to

the recognition that it is important that everyone in the team around the child considers how what they do acts as a role model for the child or young person and for others around them.

Social pedagogy is a **strengths-based approach**, starting from a position of positive regard – focusing first on the strengths of an individual and using these as a starting point to build further confidences and competencies.

The **Zone of Proximal Development theory** (Vygotsky, 1978) argues that learning is most successful in a social context, meaning that people learn more and develop further when they are supported by somebody who is more advanced in a certain area and functions as their mentor.

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