Head, Heart and Hands
Introducing social pedagogy into foster care

Introduction

This unique, transformational programme, delivered by the Fostering Network in partnership with a range of local authority and fostering agencies, will demonstrate the impact that introducing a social pedagogic approach can make to foster carers and the lives of the children they foster. By doing so we will improve educational outcomes and wellbeing for children in care, ensuring more can fulfil their potential.

Introducing social pedagogy into foster care in the UK will require a cultural and systemic shift from foster carers, social workers, local authorities and fostering agencies. A social pedagogic approach moves the focus from following procedures to building relationships; it moves foster carers and agencies from a risk averse culture to a risk management approach; it allows foster carers to make decisions; and it places the time foster carers spend with the children they foster and what they do with that time at the heart of how the state can best improve the lives of children in care. It places relationships at the heart of maintaining stability, improving educational outcomes and wellbeing.

This programme will demonstrate how to successfully introduce a social pedagogic approach and the impact this has on stability of placement, improvement in educational outcomes and the life chances of children and young people in foster care. The long term aim is then to embed this approach across the UK and enable more children in care to fulfil their potential.

What is social pedagogy?

With solid academic roots, social pedagogy has shaped child care practice across many countries in Europe and Scandinavia. It places the young person at the centre of decision making and considers their holistic world, recognising the importance of the relationships that give that world meaning. Social pedagogy ensures a balance is found between the head (logical application of knowledge based on established child development theories), the heart (recognition that we all bring our own emotional and ethical needs into our behaviour and decision making), and the hands (acknowledgment that these decisions are made in the real world and that everyday practical tasks are a fundamental opportunity to build the relationships we need to support us in our lives).

“Social pedagogues work with the whole child, aware that children think, feel, have a physical, spiritual, social and creative existence, and that all of these characteristics are in interaction in the person. This approach is in contrast to the more procedural methods used in working with children, sometimes found among some English care workers.” (Petrie, et al 2006).
Profile of the care population

There are over 59,000 children living with foster carers in the UK at any one time. Children come into care for a variety of different reasons, at different ages, and stay for different periods of time, some for just a few weeks, others until they are adults. About 20% of entrants are under one year of age, and another 20% are aged between one and four years, but 43% are aged 10 or over when they come into care.

Looking after children who have come into care having experienced abuse or neglect is a challenging task. Many children in care will have been ill treated by their parents, and many have special needs and/or a mental health disorder. They require highly trained foster carers with skill, compassion and commitment. Foster carers who have a framework - social pedagogy - that will assist them to understand and develop their own practice will be better able to form and maintain relationships with often very challenging children, for as long as they need their help.

Current outcomes for children and young people in care in the UK

The outcomes for children in care are currently poor. Tim Loughton, MP, until recently minister with responsibility for children in care, has described these outcomes as a 'scandal':

- 11.6% of children in care in England achieved 5+ GCSEs at grades A*-C including English & mathematics as opposed to 53% of all children (2010 figures);¹
- The average tariff score for children in care in Scotland was 67 as opposed to 372 for all school leavers. Around 90% of looked after children left school at 16 or younger as opposed to 37% of all school leavers. (2009-2010 figures)²
- 29% of 19 year olds who have been in care in England are not in education, employment or training (NEET) (2011 figures), against 18.8% for the general population (February 2011);³
- 65% of young people eligible for aftercare services in Scotland were not in education, employment or training;⁴
- According to a Prison Reform trust briefing published in 2010, 27% of the prison population had been in care. Given that children in care make up 2% of the total population, children in care are therefore 13 times more likely to go to prison.⁵
- According to the Promoting Health and Wellbeing document (2010), 45% of looked after children have a mental health issue as opposed to 10% of the general population.⁶

The cost benefit of improving foster care

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¹ http://www.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000978/index.shtml
³ Department for Education (2011): Children Looked After by Local Authorities in England (including adoption and care leavers) - year ending 31 March 2011
⁶ Department for Children, Schools and Families, (2009), Statutory Guidance on Promoting the health and well-being of Looked After Children
The cost to children’s services departments of a child with an unstable care career has been estimated to be over £50,000 per year, compared to the cost of £23,000 per year for a child who has a more settled placement. More starkly, one study estimated that children with no stable placement who were eventually placed in specialist residential placements cost seven times more than those who had been adopted.

It has been estimated that the cost to the Exchequer of a care leaver who leaves school at 16, is underemployed and has mental health difficulties, will be £90,000 greater than the cost of a care leaver who graduates from university and who generally enters employment by the time they are 30 years old.

Successfully introducing a social pedagogic approach will be of enormous benefit to children in foster care and to the public purse.

**Why is now the right time to introduce social pedagogy?**

In the UK, we spend over £2bn annually on children in care. The long term cost to the state is unknown.

This initiative is not about increasing this amount, but about demonstrating how existing funds could be put to much more effective use.

Despite the efforts of a range of initiatives to support foster carers in providing care, nurture and a stable life for such children, outcomes remain nothing like good enough.

There is widespread interest in trying to do things differently for these children and young people. The Government in England is implementing the findings from the Munro Review, and this is intended to lead to a fundamental shift in the culture of children’s social work which chimes with a social pedagogic approach to foster care.

The Government in Scotland have also shown significant interest in introducing a social pedagogic approach. In difficult financial times, local authorities and fostering agencies are looking to find creative and proven ways of improving outcomes for children in care. Many are involved in piloting new ways of supporting foster carers, and are already working with elements of social pedagogy although they may not name it as such.

A social pedagogic approach to their care is absolutely in line with what children and young people in care say they want and it is in line with what research tells us makes good and effective foster care.

**What will we do?**

The programme will work with six demonstration sites – a mix of local authority and independent fostering agencies in England and Scotland. These sites are now confirmed as City of Edinburgh Council; Orkney Islands Council and Aberlour Fostering (IFA Kirkcaldy, Fife) – a joint site; Staffordshire County Council; London Borough of Hackney; Surrey County Council; and Capstone Foster Care (South West) Ltd (IFA Stroud, Frome and Ringwood).

The programme will require that these agencies make systemic and cultural changes to support a social pedagogic approach. This will be achieved through a drive from the top of organisations for change, an intensive learning and development programme, hands-on support from qualified social pedagogues, and a social pedagogic approach to the recruitment of foster carers. The overall purpose is to learn from the demonstration sites about how to successfully introduce social pedagogy into foster care across the UK.
Through our **Learning Network** the programme will share and promote learning across the participating agencies and externally. The Learning Network comprises: an Advisory Group including individuals with relevant knowledge and experience who are linked with influential organisations in the arena of children’s services; a Programme Board including representatives from all the participating agencies; a Practice Group also with representatives of participating sites; and a **group of young people**. The Advisory Group and Programme Board will be chaired by Jane Haywood who was until recently Chief Executive of the Children’s Workforce Development Council.

An in-depth **evaluation programme** will evaluate and report on the process of implementation, the impact of the learning and development programme, and the process of embedding social pedagogic principles and practice in the authorities and agencies. The evaluation team is a partnership of the Centre for Child and Family Research (‘CCFR’) at Loughborough University, the Colebrook Centre for Evidence and Implementation and the National Care Advisory Service (‘NCAS’). The team is led by Lisa Holmes of CCFR and supported by expert consultant Dr. Janet Boddy.

Accountability for the overall programme rests with Robert Tapsfield, Chief Executive of the Fostering Network, supported by the programme director Raina Sheridan, the Deputy Chief Executive. The Fostering Network has a range of in-house services and skills which will also be drawn upon for the benefit of the programme. External advisers will be brought in as necessary.

**Funding**

The major part of the funding is by charitable organisations. We have secured funding from Comic Relief, Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, The Henry Smith Charity, KPMG Foundation, Man Charitable Trust and The Monument Trust. Participating agencies will fund the balance and will be required to fund for three years 50% of the employment costs of the two social pedagogues who will be employed by each agency, thereby ensuring substantial buy in from the very beginning.

**The role of the Fostering Network**

As the voice of foster care, the Fostering Network is uniquely placed to represent the views and concerns of all those involved in foster care, and is in a strong position to influence the ways in which foster care can develop, change and improve in order to meet the needs of children and young people in care.

We have a membership base that includes 99 per cent of local authorities and health and social services trusts, over 57,000 foster carers and more than 170 independent fostering providers with whom we communicate regularly.

The Fostering Network will manage this programme, supporting the infrastructure for learning, working with the demonstration sites and the evaluators to ensure that it meets its objectives. Our delivery partners are a consortium comprising Jacaranda Development, ThemPra Social Pedagogy and Professor Pat Petrie of the Institute of Education. The consortium will design and deliver the learning and development programme and provide development support to the six demonstration sites.

On completion of the programme, the Fostering Network intends to lead an active dissemination programme, provide support to local authorities and agencies who want to introduce social pedagogy, work with governments to secure their support and work with partners to further develop this approach and obtain necessary research evidence.
References and recommended further reading

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