

# **Introducing Social Pedagogy Into Residential Child Care in England**

**An Evaluation of a project commissioned by the Social  
Education Trust (SET) in September 2006 and managed  
by the National Centre for Excellence in Residential  
Child Care (NCERCC)**

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Making things better for children



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We hope this report gives a just account of all their efforts.

NCERCC is a principal point of reference and facilitates dialogue across the whole residential sector of England. NCERCC works collaboratively with key stakeholders: providers, practitioners, commissioners, researchers, regulators, children and young people are involved in its work.

NCERCC provides up-to-date information on significant policy, research and practice developments

- Opportunities to exchange and promote good practice
- The means to highlight issues critical to the well-being and life chances of children in Residential Child Care
- Access to practical tools and materials for service and practice improvement.

# Contents

<b>Acknowledgements</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>1. Executive Summary</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>2. What did this project aim to achieve?</b> .....	<b>5</b>
2.1 Social Pedagogue experts as consultants.....	5
2.2 Regional Seminars .....	5
2.3 European exchange workshop.....	6
2.4 Report.....	6
<b>3. Aims of the Evaluation</b> .....	<b>7</b>
3.1 Evaluation processes.....	7
3.2 Key themes.....	7
3.3 Collecting the Information .....	7
<b>4. Practice development process</b> .....	<b>9</b>
4.1 Participating Residential Child Care settings.....	9
4.2 Social Pedagogic themes .....	9
<b>5. What impact has the project created?</b> .....	<b>12</b>
5.1 Participants hopes and dreams of working in Residential Child Care.....	12
5.2 Initial expectations of Social Pedagogy .....	12
5.3 How did the participants find the overall process? .....	13
5.4 What did the participants take from the project .....	14
5.4.1 The most inspirational social pedagogical themes .....	14
5.4.2 Initiatives taken on implementing Social Pedagogy by participants.....	16
5.5 Barriers needing to be addressed before taking on Social Pedagogy .....	17
5.6 The young people in Residential Child Care - what do they dream of? .....	18
5.7 The experiences of the Social Pedagogue consultants in English settings.....	20
<b>6. Conclusion</b> .....	<b>22</b>
<b>7. Next Steps</b> .....	<b>24</b>
<b>Note on Authors</b> .....	<b>25</b>

# 1. Executive Summary

Discussions about the potential of social pedagogic ideas, especially in Residential Child Care have until recently been confined to academic circles and a growing number of practice settings. On the 21 June 2007, the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) published Care Matters: Time for Change. The white paper included a proposal for piloting projects to examine the effectiveness of Social Pedagogy in Residential Child Care explaining that the pilots were to focus on adapting social pedagogical approaches, as practiced in Residential Child Care settings in continental Europe, with a view to significantly improving outcomes for children in public care.

Since the white paper the interest in the social pedagogic practice has grown remarkably.

This project was commissioned by the Social Education Trust (SET) and managed by the National Centre for Excellence in Residential Child Care (NCERCC). It aimed to develop knowledge of the theories behind social pedagogic approaches, build the confidence of Residential Child Care workers and discover possible ways of translating social pedagogic approaches into meaningful practices in English Residential Child Care settings.

Nine Residential Child Care settings participated in a programme of practice development training facilitated by Social Pedagogue consultants from Germany and Denmark. The overall outcome of this pilot project, as seen through the eyes of the facilitators and participants, was highly positive. The key aims and objectives of facilitating a better understanding of the relevance and possible translation of social pedagogic approaches into the English Residential Child Care context and increasing staff confidence in relating to the ideas and translating them into their every day practice in this project, have been met.

At the beginning of the project almost half of the participants had none or very limited knowledge of social pedagogic approaches, according to the responses to an initial baseline questionnaire. The main expectations of the participants were to gain more insight into Social Pedagogy, how it could be transferred into their current practices, and what new inspirations the project could bring to their practice. Almost 60% of the participants described themselves and their work colleagues as being positively receptive towards practicing pedagogically while about 40% described themselves as being neutral or less than positively receptive.

By the end of the project, over two thirds of the participants stated that they now had a more solid understanding of the essence of Social Pedagogy. For some they regained, for others renewed, the importance of having authentic, appreciative relationships when working with young people in Residential Child Care settings. A third of the participant's affirmed that they had already taken on many aspects of a social pedagogic approach in their current practice. Participants spoke of experiencing their dreams and motivations being rekindled in choosing to work with young people in residential settings.

Almost 70% of the participants were able to connect to, translate and use aspects of the themes in Social Pedagogy that they were introduced to, immediately in their everyday practice.

Participants report the biggest impact of this project was either a reconfirmation or gaining of new perspectives on how to meet the needs of young people in Residential Child Care without needing to discard the knowledge and experience they had already built up. On the contrary they felt that they could refine and develop their existing knowledge, skills and teamwork, by consciously embracing and implementing a more social pedagogic approach in their everyday practice.

As one participant put it

*'over the years, "the head" for example, staff policies, risk assessments, children coming in as a last resort, has dominated how I perceive and work with the young people. I have*

*rediscovered 'the heart' and can see working with these young people with a renewed perspective'.*

Participants felt that the most problematic barrier to taking on a social pedagogic approach was how young people in Residential Child Care and those who chose to work with these young people are perceived in the wider English society, where coming into Residential Child Care is frequently seen as the last resort. In comparison, much of continental Europe perceives Residential Child Care as the best option for meeting some young people's needs for safety and development opportunities.

The participants reported that other barriers such as risk assessments, strict regulations in relation to safeguarding procedures, and fear of false allegations made by young people, put limitations on being able to completely translate social pedagogic relationships into current practice. Even with a commitment to child-centred working, participants felt that changing the culture within Residential Child Care will be in a context of facing increasing challenging and complex behaviour from young people.

Participants welcomed the appreciative, holistic child/centred approach Social Pedagogy offers and felt that the possibility of creating real changes for the young people in Residential Child Care for the better in England was achievable.

## **2. What did this project aim to achieve?**

This project aimed to contribute towards:

- improving outcomes for children in Residential Child Care by promoting a more holistic approach into Residential Child Care practice.
- raising awareness about the principles and philosophy of pedagogic approaches for Residential Child Care staff.
- building staff confidence in being able to translate pedagogic ideas into their everyday practice.

This was done by undertaking a programme of awareness raising, practice exchange and development within a range of Residential Child Care settings in England. The project aimed to encourage and inspire management and practitioners in Residential Child Care settings to discover how Social Pedagogy could be translated into their work environment by introducing a theory based practice 'borrowed' from continental Europe, a holistic, appreciative approach between practitioners and the young person,

This project took steps to achieve better outcomes for young people in Residential Child Care by:

- promoting learning and collaboration across different sections of the children's workforce.
- ensuring that key messages from the project regarding curriculum, training and qualification frameworks are communicated to policy makers and appropriate organizations that have the responsibility for developing the children's workforce
- spreading the learning from the project to as wide an audience as possible

### **2.1 Social Pedagogue experts as consultants**

Over a period of 3 months, five Social Pedagogues from Denmark and Germany undertook a range of practice development activities with practitioners and management from nine different Residential Child Care settings situated in the south and north west of England.

South – 'hands-on' mentoring approach

- In the south, 3 different Residential Child Care settings; a behavioural resource service, an intake unit, a long term unit, each had a Social Pedagogue consultant work on shift for 3 consecutive days, 4 times during the 3 month period, a total of 12 days in each setting.

North-West – training and development approach

- In the north-west, participants from 6 different Residential Child Care settings, joined together in attending a series of development workshops led by Social Pedagogue consultants. Three two-day programmes were held during the 3-month period, a total of 6 days.

The main objectives for the Social Pedagogue consultants were to introduce the Residential Child Care workers and management to key themes in pedagogic approaches and supporting the staff in relating these ideas to their everyday practice. The Social Pedagogue consultants were also able to assist managers and Residential Child Care workers in selecting key areas for possible translation of the social pedagogic approach.

### **2.2 Regional Seminars**

Regional seminars were held after the practice development process had ended. Project participants shared their learning from the three-month intensive introduction to Social Pedagogy

with an invited audience of more than fifty Residential Child Care managers and practitioners in each location. Key themes of a social pedagogic approach were introduced and the initial findings from the project were shared with this wider audience.

### **2.3 European exchange workshop**

The SET organized a practice exchange workshop which took place at the University of Ghent in Belgium, which involved all of the English participants, the Social Pedagogue consultants and additional experts on Social Pedagogy from Belgium, Holland and Sweden. This initiative aimed to link the English participants with practitioner colleagues working in children's homes in Belgium as well as further developing ideas on social pedagogical approaches.

### **2.4 Report**

This report aims to give an extensive and in-depth overall view on the project. It will be available on the NCERCC website. [www.ncb.org.uk/ncercc](http://www.ncb.org.uk/ncercc)

### **3. Aims of the Evaluation**

The main aims of this evaluation were to:

- a) ensure the validation of experiences as seen by the participants in this pilot project
- b) document the project's key themes from a Social Pedagogy perspective that can be translated into an English setting

#### **3.1 Evaluation processes**

The main challenge of this evaluation process was to identify a model that could look at both the effectiveness of the project and whether there were any differences experienced by the participants in the project. The model needed to be able to grasp the uniqueness of the process in this project, and acquire valid information on both the immediate impact and the potential for a longer-term impact.

The practice developments that took place were different from each other in approach (each brought their own perspective on being a Social Pedagogue) and the fact that the Social Pedagogues themselves were the tools of the actual learning process. This turned out to be the strength when validating the final outcomes.

Using a process evaluation model as the underlying framework and embracing the holistic and relationship-based fundamentals of Social Pedagogy, it was agreed that the evaluation would be built around an appreciative inquiry approach. This approach creates opportunities for the participants to focus on seeking out the best of "what is" and is designed to ignite dreams of "what might be". This is one of many questions which form the everyday practice of a Social Pedagogue.

#### **3.2 Key themes**

The key questions put to the participants throughout this process focused on:

- expectations of coming into the project, existing knowledge of Social Pedagogy and what changes they were hoping to experience.
- experiences during the practice development, and what social pedagogic topic had the most impact.
- changes experienced in level of skill, competencies and confidence with practicing Social Pedagogy; receptiveness on practicing social pedagogic approaches within the staff team.
- reflections on changes within relationships with the children as individuals and as a group at the Residential Child Care settings; implementing Social Pedagogy into their every day practice.
- immediate actions; barriers that need to be addressed, and if they were to miraculously disappear, what would have changed in the workplace – with the workers – with the children?

#### **3.3 Collecting the information**

In supporting an appreciative inquiry based evaluation approach, specific evaluation instruments were utilised. Information used in the evaluation process was gathered from:

- an evaluation questionnaire, which was divided into two parts, each part targeting specific phases in the project, were given to all participants participating in the in-depth development practice. 70% of the participants returned a questionnaire.



- interviews were conducted with Residential Child Care workers, senior practitioners and managers, during and after the in-depth development practice.
- a small number of interviews were also carried out with young people, who were currently residing at the Residential Child Care settings and had been present while the practice development was taking place.
- discussions, experiences and reflections that were shared between the Social Pedagogue consultants during the development.
- issues, reflections and concerns raised by participants attending the regional seminars.

The evaluator was able to take part in the development of the underlying social pedagogic themes that were used by the team of Social Pedagogue consultants in the practice development process.

## 4. Practice development process

### 4.1 Participating Residential Child Care settings

Staff in settings coming from South and North West participated in the practice development process. Participants included managers, senior practitioners and Residential Child Care workers. All settings had volunteered to be part of this project.

Over a period of 3 months, two very different approaches were used to deliver the practice development.

Settings in the 'south' received a 'hands-on' introduction to Social Pedagogy. Each setting had their own Social Pedagogue consultant, working alongside the child care team. The common task of each Social Pedagogue was to introduce social pedagogic theories, and in collaboration with the management, find and support key themes of how the social pedagogic approach could be translated into everyday practice in each specific setting.

The participants in the 'north west' attended developmental workshops away from their daily practice settings. Two Social Pedagogue consultants led these workshops. Each had the task of introducing social pedagogic theories and supporting the participants in finding out how the social pedagogic approach could be translated into specific English practice settings. Participants faced the additional challenge of having to take their ideas about Social Pedagogy back into their everyday settings without the direct support of the Social Pedagogues facilitating the workshops.

### 4.2 Social Pedagogic themes

In introducing social pedagogic ideas into English Residential Child Care settings there were two essential factors that had to be taken into consideration:

- ideas had to convey the essence of the theory behind Social Pedagogy
- the social pedagogic themes had to be able to be translated into every day practice in English settings

Social Pedagogy is a system of theory, practice and training that supports the overall development of the whole child. It can be defined as "education in the broadest sense of the word" \*(Petrie et al. 2006). Social Pedagogy takes a holistic view of young people – looking at all aspects of a young person's life skills.

The essence of social pedagogic practice is the conscious use of relationships between the Social Pedagogue and the young people living in Residential Child Care settings in which young people are able to develop their life skills safely and without the fear of rejection.

The following five Social Pedagogic themes were introduced to participants, by the Social Pedagogue consultants:

#### **The 3 P's: the 'private,' the 'personal,' and the 'professional'**

*To enable yourself to interact with a child or young person, build a relation with the young person, be a role model and be authentic it is always important to be aware of three different aspects of your self.*

***The private pedagogue:*** *Is the person who is known to your friends and family. The private pedagogue should not be in any relation with a child in care. The private pedagogue is who you are outside your work.*

**The personal pedagogue:** *Is who you are within the professional setting. This is where you use 'yourself'. The personal P is what you offer to the young person. If you want to build a relation with a young person, you have to put yourself into the relationship so the young person can relate to you.*

**The professional pedagogue:** *Is what helps you to explain the young person's actions. For example if the young person is being abusive or challenging towards you or others. The professional P is what enables you to keep on offering contact even if you are being refused, and remain protective of your personal 'P' too. You also have to bear in mind that the young people might refuse to allow you to protect them since they have been hurt in personal relations so many times. The professional pedagogue takes this understanding from and builds on various theories and this enables reflection to take place. A professional reflection on your own and others practice enables you to evaluate on the progress you have seen with a young person. (Social Pedagogue Consultants)*

Social Pedagogues use the 3 P's to reflect on their actions and feelings in interacting with young people and colleagues. By using this reflective structure the Social Pedagogue can understand their actions and where they may be coming from. The 3 P's enable the Social Pedagogue to maintain an authentic interaction with young people and at the same time protect their "inner self".

A big subject for discussion in the project has been the idea of being professional. Does "being professional" mean that you leave all thoughts, all feelings behind when you come to work? The 3 P's show how is it possible for every residential practitioner working with pedagogical aims, to use their personality in practice.

### **Head, Heart and Hands**

*Pedagogy is about making connections and creating a coherent, harmonious and reflected framework of various theories and concepts and about working consciously with head, heart, and hands. (Social Pedagogue Consultants)*

The Social Pedagogue uses theory, the head, to understand and to reflect on what is happening in a relationship between him/herself and the young people, what adjustments need to be made in the relationship to continue to support the young people and what is the best way to go about it.

By using the heart, the fundamentals of trust, hope and authenticity are hopefully experienced in the relationship with the young people.

The Social Pedagogue is the tool of Social Pedagogy in practice, using the hands to bring about activities, inviting contact opportunities that build relationships with the young people. Social Pedagogues act to combine, harmonize and balance the cognitive and reflective, the emotional and sensual, and the practical and active, in a holistic education for the head, heart, and hands of the child.

### **The Common Third**

This theory supports the building of relationships, by using opportunities for young people to be interacting with an adult, with the activity as the reason to be together, within a safe setting. Fundamental to this process is that the Social Pedagogue and the young person negotiate and agree on the terms on which the activity is to take place. There is no coercion or hidden agenda involved. The social pedagogic goal is that by being together, with an open and negotiable agreement, the young person will in time gain new experiences of relationships, thus in the long run re-establishing the young person's trust in relationships with adults.

## **Shared Living Space**

Social Pedagogues in Residential Child Care have an understanding that the milieu they are working in is the living space of the young people. Social Pedagogues use this phenomenon to show that life in a home can be different, that conflicts that happen in everyday life in a home can be solved in other ways than previous negative experiences of the young people.

### **The reflective practitioner in a group care setting**

When working with young people that can have very challenging behaviour you need to know that you can rely on your colleagues. When working with other human beings and setting aims for young peoples development, it is very important to be able to reflect with colleagues. A large part of Social Pedagogy training is learning different methods of group reflection in which all team members are able to reflect with each other and all are seen and heard.

## **5. What impact has the project created?**

To be able to see what difference the project has had, it was important to have an idea of where the participants see themselves coming from and how they wished to view the future of Residential Child Care work. These are the essential questions that Social Pedagogues ask themselves.

### **5.1 Participants hopes and dreams of working in Residential Child Care**

The main reasons participants in this project have for working in Residential Child Care is the belief that they can make a real difference in the lives of young people. They see their purpose as

*'...supporting young people, help them have fun, security and develop skills...'* (Social Pedagogue Consultants)

thus providing the young people with unconditional relationships to build on and be able to support the young people in believing in themselves so as they begin to realise personal goals.

Participants expressed some of the rewarding experiences they value in their work: for example when contributing to moving a young person into a more appropriate placement; when experiencing a young person genuinely settling down and feeling safe in the environment the children's home provides; or seeing the young person just having a good day and knowing that the small differences created for the young person can have a lasting impact on their life.

Many of the participants said the strengths of residential work were based in the child centred approach that the Residential Child Care workers had, the value of having good teamwork, and the commitment by government to improve Residential Child Care for young people.

Hopes and dreams for the future consisted of gaining acknowledgement from the wider society for the work being done in Residential Child Care settings. Other dreams were having more resources to enable better training of care workers, building team strategies and thus securing staff consistency. Participants also voiced hopes of having more and better placements for young people when they left Residential Child Care.

### **5.2 Initial expectations of Social Pedagogy**

Over half of the participants coming into the project had none or very limited knowledge of what Social Pedagogy was and how it presents itself in everyday practice with young people in Residential Child Care. Most of the participants' knowledge came from articles and discussions of what Social Pedagogy might and could be.

Mostly the participants sought out information on Social Pedagogy when they became part of the project. Almost 60% of the participants described themselves and their colleagues as being positively receptive in practicing Social Pedagogy while about 40% described themselves as being neutral or less than receptive to practicing Social Pedagogy.

The participants expressed five main expectations at the beginning of this project.

#### **Improving skills in building relationships with young people**

The search for ways to improve outcomes for the young people in Residential Child Care were very much in the minds of the participants throughout the project, both in terms of how the individual could be more aware of one's own role in approaching relationships with the young person and in creating a safe place for the young person. Participants had visions of having a shared understanding within their work teams on how to understand and meet the needs of the

young people, and contributing to broadening and developing better ways to engage the young person more successfully.

### **What is Social Pedagogy?**

A firm understanding of Social Pedagogy was high on the expectations list. This was given particular emphasis by participants from the north west. They felt they had to be able to take back to their team an idea of what Social Pedagogy was about. Participants coming from the south did not share this sense of responsibility as the practice development was carried out by the Social Pedagogy consultants in each of the children's homes.

### **How to use social pedagogic approaches in current practice**

There was a direct correlation between understanding what Social Pedagogy was and the expectation of being able to use this approach in current practice. Participants had expectations that the knowledge they obtained would contribute to improving their current practice. Being part of the project presented a chance to re-evaluate their current work practice and be inspired to make improvements.

### **New ways of working in Residential Child Care**

Many of the participants had a wish that this project would bring about new, creative ways of developing everyday practice in their children's home, especially in terms of how to meet the needs of young people with challenging behaviour.

### **Sharing knowledge with work teams**

Participants from the north west expected to be able to share knowledge with their work teams. Some of the participants in the south had experience of good teamwork and saw the project as an opportunity to create a more cohesive team and to promote openness for change in their teamwork environment.

## **5.3 How did the participants find the overall process?**

The two different approaches to developing practice had their strengths and weaknesses. How, what and when participants were engaged in the on-going process depended highly upon factors such as how much the participants were able to have time freed up at their respective settings, and the level of support and preparation the practitioners had from management/senior practitioners - both coming into the project and during the project's process.

Overall, a majority of the participants found the process to be relevant and useful. The level of training, combined with useful activities and discussions, made the social pedagogic themes easier to understand, especially as time went on. Some of the new theories, the intentions of some of the activities and understanding aspects of some of the proposed steps to take when undertaking a more social pedagogic approach within their everyday practice, were initially more difficult to take in.

At the end of the project, half of the participants confirmed that they and their colleagues were more receptive to Social Pedagogy than at the beginning of the process. On the other hand, half of the participants continued to report that they still found their colleagues as resistant to changing their current practice approach as they were before coming into the project.

The hands-on approach had a positive effect in the south settings, where participants remained in their work place during the 'interventions'. Early on in the process some of the participants were

inspired by this new approach and played a significant role in keeping enthusiasm going between each visit from the Social Pedagogue consultant. Those participants, who had more easily embraced the underlying philosophy of a social pedagogic approach, were actively used by the Social Pedagogues as role models to convey social pedagogic themes to their teams.

Clarifying the purpose, role and tasks of any project is fundamental for the development of Social Pedagogy in any Residential Child Care setting. The lack of advance briefing for all team members in the south settings led to an understandable degree of scepticism which contributed to a reluctance to engage in changing their current practice. Some team members did not understand why they had an 'outsider' coming into their children's home. They did not know what was expected of them, and needed more support from their managers. One consequence of this was that initially a lot of the Social Pedagogue's time was used in promoting the project, clarifying what it hoped to achieve, giving reassurance and building trust between the participants and each Social Pedagogue. This left less time for discussion on how the pedagogical ideas and practices could be translated into meaningful practice for the whole team.

The context for the developmental workshops in the north west, was a group of participants, who did not all know each other before hand, coming together outside of their usual workplace, choosing to be open to something new and being able to leave behind existing roles in their own team cultures. This made it easier to introduce Social Pedagogy in all its complexities. The participants could choose what to take or leave from each session. They alone had the responsibility of sharing their knowledge and ideas of Social Pedagogy within their teams. The follow up visits two months after the end of the workshops demonstrated how difficult 'cascading' learning can be. The absence of a Social Pedagogue working alongside the team within each residential setting raises the question about who can guide, support and together with the participants, collectively reflect on how to take on a more social pedagogic approach. The learning point is that it places a great responsibility on participants in the workshops to individually attempt to impart knowledge and ideas on Social Pedagogy without a Social Pedagogue 'expert' to use as a buffer or to discuss uncertainties with, particularly if the team is not receptive towards taking on the essential themes in Social Pedagogy.

## **5.4 What did the participants take from the project**

There were variables that influenced what participants gained from the project; the style of practice development, the very different facilitating styles of each Social Pedagogue, the actual context and culture of each children's home. The outcome of what each individual participant found most inspirational turned out to be as wide ranging as the social pedagogic topics they were introduced to. There were however particular themes that participants found most inspirational.

### **5.4.1 The most inspirational social pedagogical themes**

#### **The 'Personal P' from the 3 P's - the Personal, the Professional, the Private**

*'It is often the very simple things that count, like being there and having time for the young person, appreciating their opinions and wishes by trying to do the things they ask, or being somebody who seems approachable and who they can confide in. This demonstrates the essentiality of the personal pedagogue, because a pedagogic relationship is a human relationship and as such always personal.'* (Social Pedagogue consultant)

When introduced to the 3 P's linked to "head-heart-hands" many of the participants rediscovered a deeply felt recognition of their purpose and motivation for being in this field of work to begin with. They all believed that they could make a real difference in improving the lives of the young people. Staff reported that they had to distance themselves when working with the young people due to increasing procedure, policies, time spent on risk assessment and allegations from the young people. As many participants put it, the professional role plays a large part in their contact and

relationships with the young people. The 'personal' brought a new, safe perspective about how to bring themselves back into the relationships, thus making the contact more authentic for both themselves and the young person involved.

The 3P's also provided a model, by which the participants could reflect on their own behaviour, ways to act in relationships with the young person and helped them put into words what they were experiencing with certain young people and situations in their everyday practice.

This contributed to boosting the participant's confidence about how to engage with and be more authentic in interactions with the young people and talk more openly with their colleagues. It helped the participants to reflect, daring to be more confident in letting the young people closer yet still retaining a professional relationship.

The overall experience of the '3P's' was that they were very easy to translate into the participant's own individual way of working. They could be carried out by a residential practitioner or manager in every day practice. It is an idea that can be used by the participants, to understand a given experience or as a guide on how to respond in a given situation.

A paradox was observed as to whether opening up to having more genuine, closer relationships could lead to the participants being more vulnerable to allegations and other complications. Yet there was an overall acknowledgement that more authentic relationships would lead to better outcomes for the young people. A social pedagogic relationship, which aims to allow for the development of the young person through using the relationship without fear of rejection, would enable young people to have more ownership of their feelings and actions.

### **Common third**

Most of the participants saw an immediate possibility of being able to translate this theme directly into their everyday practice. The introduction of the 'common third' theme within Social Pedagogy inspired the participants, as it encouraged the removal of barriers to doing different activities with the young person. It allowed them to see that these activities did not necessarily have to be limited to what was within the education and experience of residential practitioners. The importance of engaging the young person in positive contact in every day routines and understanding the importance of doing this together shifted the views of many of the participants.

The north west developmental workshops, rooted in activity-based learning, inspired participants who came away with many ideas on activities to engage young people. They found the 'common third' to be of direct use in building relationships: that it is all right to do fun things together with the young person. Engaging in an activity together enables the young person to experience safe, trusting successful contact, which in turn provides the opportunity to support developing the young people skills.

### **Group dynamics and teamwork**

Many of the participants experienced how the seemingly impossible becomes possible through understanding group dynamics and how effective communication in a team, combined with the synergy that comes from empowering reflective teamwork can produce better outcomes. This came through in the activities, discussions on social pedagogic approaches, and the combination of being introduced to aspects of being a reflective practitioner in relation to everyday practice, while always a part of a larger team.

By sharing individual experiences of what worked in certain situations with a young person, participants were able to find new perspectives on how to work together as a team. They found that giving room for being personal in their every day practice, while being professional by sharing this knowledge within the team, contributed towards developing authentic relationships with the young people.

Bengtsson, Chamberlain, Crimmens, Stanley - Introducing Social Pedagogy into RCC in England 2008



Two reflections by a Social Pedagogue consultant illustrate the relationship in practice between the 3 P's and use of the common third:

*'The young person wants to build something out of wood. I might have never done it before but we decide to do it together. We find out together what we need and where to get it and how to get started. The aim of the activity is not only the end product but also developing our empathic experience and associated skills. These are developed through our mutual communication. The personal P is represented by the willingness to show lack of skills, the professional P is represented by the aim of developing the young person's social skills, patience and listening.'* (Social Pedagogue Consultants)

*'One day a colleague, myself and two young persons spend an afternoon walking her dog at the beach. It was remarkable to observe that the behaviour of one young person was very different from their usual behaviour, chatting for a very long time with the worker, being confident to collect the dog from local fishermen who the dog ran to. Walking the dog became the link between the young person and the worker.'* (Social Pedagogue Consultants)

Both managers and Residential Child Care workers were inspired by teamwork as a reflective platform. Many felt that better teamwork, a necessary part of encouraging social pedagogic relationships could bring about real long-term change for the young people in Residential Child Care settings.

The need to have more open minded, appreciative and reflective teamwork was felt to be vital though workers and managers appeared to have different levels of confidence about whether this could be achieved.

Participants took most readily to those themes that were, for them, most recognisable and seemingly most straightforward in putting into immediate action. Managers and senior practitioners, in particular, took to heart the 'appreciative approach' in relationships, especially in terms of having better communication with their staff, empowering staff to be more confident and to work together as a team. They found that organising time for the staff to share their own reflections with their colleagues, thus creating the possibility of creating team reflections and a higher chance of consistency in meeting the needs of young people, was of particular importance.

Participants spoke of finding similarities between Social Pedagogy themes and their own practice. Becoming conscious of being able to connect and unify as a team, as compared to the perhaps more fragmented ways of current practice, was a vital finding.

#### **5.4.2 Initiatives taken on implementing Social Pedagogy by participants**

Initiatives to develop Social Pedagogy practices have been ongoing throughout the process. Some of the initiatives have come from the participants' changing their own ways of working in every day practice, whilst others have come from managers. Those participants, who said that they already practice in ways that they perceived to be very similar to the social pedagogic approach, felt inspired to use newly found perspectives to develop their work.

Having experienced a method that combined theory and activity, participants felt confident to carry out what they saw as the responsibility to keep the awareness of Social Pedagogy going. They saw themselves as role models for their colleagues.

Support from their managers in this project had a direct impact on day-to-day practice and therefore the potential for maintaining and building a social pedagogic practice longer term. Participants that came from settings where they still felt that half their colleagues were not being receptive to the ideas of Social Pedagogy voiced frustrations and sadness. They thought that

Bengtsson, Chamberlain, Crimmens, Stanley - Introducing Social Pedagogy into RCC in England 2008

without management support they would not be able to translate their learning and influence the practice of colleagues in their team.

There are examples of changes in practice. In one setting a day was planned with the support of two Social Pedagogues where the team undertook the task of identifying and seeking to develop a set of shared values. In another children's home managers removed the use of sanction schemes and instead took on the task of focusing on building appreciative relationships by encouraging the young people to take ownership of their own actions.

## **5.5 Barriers needing to be addressed before taking on Social Pedagogy**

The barriers that the participants perceived as obstacles to take on the social pedagogic approach fell into 4 major categories.

### **Culture within current Residential Child Care settings**

Over a third of the participants put this as the most needed barrier to be addressed. There were nuances in what the participants specifically meant by culture. For the most part, participants focused on the learning culture between staff. There was a predominant culture within their current settings that did not support change, new perspectives on the current practice, nor the ability to see the positive in sharing knowledge and seeing themselves as perhaps the greatest barrier for bringing about renewed perspectives for every day practice. As one participant put it "half of my colleagues are not welcoming change".

The participants did not explain this in depth, but the impression of some of the factors contributing to this culture lies perhaps within the fact that some of staff themselves held negative expectations for the outcomes for young people in Residential Child Care that reflected the society around them. This in itself should be of great concern, as staff expectations of negative outcomes can become a self-fulfilling prophecy. The development of a positive culture in all settings, with positive expectations of young people, is an obvious need and a project in itself that necessarily connects policy and practice.

### **Government policies**

Almost a third of the participants addressed the problem of government policies having an ever-growing restricting effect on every day practice. Two factors appear to be prominent: the time required to implement these policies; the number of staff who fear being reprimanded or becoming the target of allegations from young people, resulting in them refraining from any real interaction between themselves and the young people.

Almost all participants thought that safeguarding procedures, the inappropriate assertion of the rights of young people in care and risk assessments were taking away the focus of what the real goal of working with young people in Residential Child Care settings should be. This focus is being replaced by a distancing between the staff and the young people. Participants with longer seniority within this field remembered how working with young people in Residential Child Care once was and reported it as very similar to the approach introduced by this project.

Another vital area of concern is the perception of a lack of appropriate placements for the young people after they leave Residential Child Care. The growing complexity of problems and challenging behaviour of the young people coming into longer term children's homes present a real problem of finding an appropriate placement afterwards, that will not result in another set of broken relationship for the young person.

## **Lack of resources**

Managers expressed concern that there is a growing problem of securing funding, and recruiting and maintaining a competent staff team.

## **Societal perceptions of Residential Child Care**

Many of the participants spoke of problems related to the exclusion of the young people they look after, especially being excluded from school. The decision to place young people into Residential Child Care can be seen as a last resort. This can have a negative influence on how the wider society perceives both young people living in Residential Child Care settings and the people that choose to work in these settings. Though this may not be a universal point of view, this exists at an organisational level as a concern and culture and needs to be analysed and challenged.

As one of the participants said

*“I really am envious of how young people and the work done for them is so valued in your part of the world [Scandinavia]. We could achieve much more here if cultural perceptions were different”*

### **5.6 The young people in Residential Child Care - what do they dream of?**

Participants in the North West asked the young people they worked with to list what they considered important in a good worker. In their eyes a good worker is somebody who:

- Cares for them
- Is honest
- Listens and understands what they say
- Is organized
- Is approachable
- Makes them laugh
- Does nice things with them
- Talks to them and takes them out
- Tries to do the things that they ask
- Gives them some individual time
- Treats them with respect
- Gives them a feeling of safety
- Looks after them
- Keeps stuff confidential, who they can share with
- Provides relationship and attachment
- Is consistent
- Is open about ‘different’ behaviour
- Is helpful
- Is in tune with children and young people
- Is there

Three young people, aged 13 to 16, resident in one of the children’s homes in the South that participated in the project, were interviewed. One of the young people had moved in a couple of months previously and one of the young people had lived at the same children’s home for over two and a half years. The main themes explored in the interview were about the young person’s hopes and dreams for Residential Child Care, changes they wished for and what they considered valuable and desirable. The young people made the following main points:

## **Stability**

The young people were very content living in their current residential settings. The reasons they gave as to why they were living in Residential Child Care were all based on their bad behaviour at the last foster care family, by misbehaving, being 'naughty', making trouble within the foster family.

They all expressed the hope to be able to stay where they were living until they were at least 18, to become more independent and then be able to live on their own.

## **Relationships with Residential Child Care Staff**

All of the young people spoke of how they get on well with some of the staff and not so well with others. Overall they said they were happy with how the staff treated them, and felt that they could go to the staff if they needed help, though they all expressed a wish to have more close contact with the staff, one to one or in a group.

Their wish for more meaningful contact was expressed by one of the young people saying

*'I wish I could have more comfort ..... that I could ask for more when I am sad ... to get to know me'*

and by another of the young person

*'they are always busy with xxx. I wish they would spend more time with me, that would be nice.'*

When asked about which expectations they thought the staff might have on their behalf, they all spoke of expectations in terms of the rules they had in the setting i.e. do not break the rules, get along with staff and the others living in the setting, no drinking, no hitting and other disciplinary expectations only based on explicit behaviour.

## **Group activities**

The young people wished for more activities together with the staff and they also wished for more activities together as a group of young people. As one of the young people put it

*'It would be nice to have an activity all together, just like a family.'*

Activities could also be playing games or watching television together.

Young people focused on wishing that the staff would spend more time with them due to the atmosphere at the children's home, where it had been a very turbulent summer. The overall impression given by the young people was of needs and wishes to be appreciated by interaction and contact with the staff. The young people remembered in detail any activity they had had with the Social Pedagogue consultant that came into their children's home during this project.

The young people placed a high value on being together with the staff. Even though they felt they were in the children's home setting because they were not good enough to stay at earlier placements, they experienced difficulties in the house and that there were many conflicts amongst the young people, they trust and need the staff to be there, to support and help them. Seen through the eyes of young people, these comments confirm the value of relationships with staff in Residential Child Care settings.

## **5.7 The experiences of the Social Pedagogue consultants in English settings**

In keeping with role modelling, the real spirit of social pedagogic relationships, all Social Pedagogue consultants were firm, persistent yet attentive towards the needs of the participants. Each Social Pedagogue consultant's training programme was tuned and refined each time the Social Pedagogue met the participants. The approach chosen, the importance of which topics to discuss and how, were challenging when possible and reassuring when needed. This is well represented in this extract from the report by the North West pair of Social Pedagogues

*“Our training was not only about pedagogy: pedagogy was ever-present, in the methods we used, in the exercises we chose, in the behaviour and the interaction we showed as trainers, the relationships we built, and in the concepts and thoughts we discussed”*

All of the Social Pedagogue consultants reflected on the complexity, and diversity of Social Pedagogy and the challenge of transporting a theoretical framework and approach from one culture to another. All of the five Social Pedagogue consultants had previous experience working in Residential Child Care. They had reservations about how Residential Child Care workers in the cultural and political system of England would or could embrace such an approach. Whatever the difficulties met in the process of introducing Social Pedagogy, they all concluded that the aim of raising awareness of Social Pedagogy, as another way of working within Residential Child Care settings, and building the confidence of participants to translate social pedagogic approaches into their every day practice, was achieved with many of the project's participants.

The Social Pedagogue consultants that worked individually in the children's homes emphasised the importance of clarifying the purpose of the programme with all participants and securing management support. The hands-on in-house approach should begin with an introductory seminar, which includes all the Residential Child Care workers and their managers, to achieve a common understanding of Social Pedagogy and to agree how the Social Pedagogues are going to be involved in the day-to-day activities in the children's home.

As the two practice development approaches were so very different from each other, it presented the opportunity of comparing the strengths and weaknesses of each approach.

### **In-house approach**

This approach is a very intimate situation for both participants and the Social Pedagogues. The Social Pedagogues were directly involved in practice. This meant that trust in the Social Pedagogue had to build up before learning could take place. This proved to be a big challenge, especially in the settings where management could not provide the support and stability originally hoped for. It proved a big challenge for the Social Pedagogues to build a level of trust that could provide a safe, stable learning environment for the participants. The Social Pedagogues were also working alone within each of their allocated settings. This raised the risk of developing an unsuccessful learning process because of the chemistry between each individual Social Pedagogue consultant and prominent members of the settings staff team and managers or meeting and having to deal with a negative learning culture.

The in-house approach meant that the participants could not “hide” how much of the social pedagogic approach was understood and implemented into every day practice. The Social Pedagogue consultant was physically present while the learning was on going.

The advantage of this approach is the immense strength and long lasting effect that occurs when the team, part of the team or managers start to grasp the essence of a social pedagogic approach and begin to take this approach to heart. Having the Social Pedagogue consultant within the setting observing, understanding the context of Social Pedagogy in that particular setting, and

being able to offer immediate coaching is extremely valuable for the participants and has the potential to enable Social Pedagogy to be practised in a meaningful way.

### **Developmental workshops**

This approach took place away from the participant's usual workplace and their existing roles within their work teams, and allowed them to take on-board learning something new and consider changes to their current practice. The Social Pedagogue consultants did not know what the participants chose to take with them after taking part in each workshop. There was the potential that the participants could choose not to take any of the learning with them or misunderstand what the learning was about. There were no Social Pedagogue consultants to see how their attempts at using the social pedagogic approach were actually developing. The fragility of there only being two participants from each setting, (in one case only one participant from a setting) allows room for losing knowledge. It places a large responsibility on the participants in terms of becoming "the experts" within their team and thus heightens the risk of only creating a short-term impact on the everyday practice.

The strengths of the developmental workshops lay within the participant's experience of good teamwork between the two Social Pedagogue consultants and the fact that the two Social Pedagogues were of opposite gender. The consultants provided the participants with positive role models to identify with thus creating a trusting and safe atmosphere for learning from the outset.

Another factor in favour of this approach was precisely the effect of enabling the participants to learn outside their usual context and loosen up on the role they have in their usual workplace. This provided opportunities for each individual participant to be openly curious without stepping outside his or her usual way of being.

The group particularly took to the approach of 'challenge to learn.' Each participant had the opportunity to take as much or as little as they chose from each exercise. Such opportunity-led learning allowed participants to engage as they felt able and to see how they may implement the learning as possibilities arise in their workplace.

## **6. Conclusion**

This project explores the potentially transformational opportunities offered by Social Pedagogy in Chapter 4 'Ensuring that children are in the right placements' in the Care Matters Green Paper (October 2006). It also anticipates government interest in looking at the effectiveness of Social Pedagogy which is expressed on p.58 para.3.59 in the subsequent Care Matters White Paper (June 2007) by funding a pilot programme in Residential Child Care.

This project was on a small scale. It actively involved 30 Residential Child Care workers and managers from two urban local authority settings, one county authority and a major voluntary sector provider. From these small beginnings it has the potential to impact directly on a much wider range of practice. It is hoped that the lessons learnt from this project will provide a sound foundation from which to develop the national pilots funded by the government.

The project has achieved the aim of raising awareness of possibilities of embracing and translating social pedagogic approaches into English Residential Child Care practice settings, and has raised the confidence of many of the participants to do so.

Contemporary understanding of what it means to be an effective 'corporate parent' as articulated in Care Matters would indicate that Local Authority councillors and officers with responsibility for children's services would also benefit from awareness raising about the potential of Social Pedagogy to better meet the needs of looked after children in residential settings.

### **Learning expectations**

At the end of the practice development programme over two thirds of the participants reported that they:

- had a better understanding of Social Pedagogy;
- were able to use Social Pedagogy in their current every day practice;
- were inspired about new perspectives on how to work with young people;
- had enough of a grasp of Social Pedagogy to share with their work team;
- were able to further improve skills on building relationships with young people;

Participants could identify with the main themes of Social Pedagogy that were introduced throughout the process; their confidence was raised as they experienced possibilities of being able to translate particular themes from social pedagogic approaches almost immediately into their every day practice.

### **Combining the two approaches in future development**

There were two different approaches to practice development in this project. Evaluation suggests that elements of both approaches should be adopted in order to optimise the potential for Social Pedagogy to become embedded in current practice. The findings from this study suggest that any programme needs to start by raising awareness of both Residential Child Care workers and their managers, and ideally this needs to include all child care managers whose decision-making could impact on Residential Child Care settings.

This could be followed with a more detailed two-day workshop involving Residential Child Care staff and their managers where the overall theory and process becomes shared knowledge.

In-house support from Social Pedagogue consultants working alongside child care teams would be supplemented with reflective learning workshops on social pedagogic themes outside the workplace. These workshops could involve workers from a number of settings. Learning from each

element of this educational process could be cascaded through team meetings and group supervision.

### **Confirmation of existing practice as the basis for future developments**

Participants report the biggest impact of this project is that it affirms the value of much of the existing practice base on how to meet the needs of young people in Residential Child Care without needing to discard the knowledge and experience they have already built up. On the contrary they experienced that they could use their existing practice as a foundation to refine and develop their knowledge, skills and teamwork, by consciously embracing and implementing a more social pedagogic approach in their everyday practice.

The opportunities that Social Pedagogy brings for Residential Child Care should therefore be seen as endorsing much of current practice. Social Pedagogy offers 'freshness' – a critical reflection of one's own practice strengthened with grounded theory, a language that conveys a positive concept of children, and new perspectives to re-define Residential Child Care practice.

### **Overcoming barriers to effective learning**

Stable, supportive managers willing and able to support a positive learning process and a positive team learning culture were the explanations offered by participants for settings in which social pedagogical ideas were positively received and implemented into practice. Equally the absence of supportive managers and a negative culture were seen as barriers to further development. Future programmes need to take these factors into account in planning for Social Pedagogy developments.

### **Embedding Social Pedagogy practice in the longer term**

It is difficult to predict the extent which this project will have on practice in Residential Child Care in the longer term. Most participants were committed to continuing to develop these ideas at the end of the project. The European Exchange workshop in October 2007 provided an opportunity to develop a practice network, with the possibility of continental European – based Social Pedagogues 'buddying' their English colleagues. However practice development will require a more sustained framework of professional education and training that will provide opportunities to systematically develop, refresh and renew learning. This will necessitate moving beyond the current delivery of the National Minimum Standard of NVQ level 3, and into Foundation Degree, Honours Degree and postgraduate qualifications as currently available to some sectors in the Children's Workforce.

The next steps are dependent on continued government investment in research and practice development. The national pilots, to be carried out over a three-year period from 2008, should provide a more substantial evidence base and could provide the impetus for the development of a range of education and training opportunities to emerge.



## **7. Next Steps**

### **Raising Awareness and promoting social pedagogical approaches**

The ideas underlying Social Pedagogy as well as the theory and practice principles will need to be actively promoted to ensure that they become part of the normal discussions which take place among policy makers, at both central and local government levels, managers across children's services in the maintained, independent and voluntary sectors, as well as front line staff actively engaged in working with children and young people. Raising awareness of the potential of Social Pedagogy to operate as a change agent in policy and practice development would be an essential part of adapting these ideas, principles and practices into an English context, as part of the 'Championing Children' agenda.

Some steps to raise awareness and develop these agendas have already been taken:

- a website, [www.socialpedagogyuk.com](http://www.socialpedagogyuk.com), sponsored by Jacaranda recruitment and dedicated to the promotion and dissemination of Social Pedagogy practice and research, has been launched
- a network, coordinated by Thomas Coram research Institute, of educationalists working in Higher Education who are committed to developing education and training that incorporates Social Pedagogy has been set up.

The idea of a practice development network was discussed during the work of the project. The European Exchange Workshop demonstrated one way in which links could be made with Social Pedagogue practitioners working with children and young people in a range of settings. This idea needs to be built upon by for example increasing the number of Social Pedagogy students who undertake their practice placements in English settings and encouraging English practitioners and their managers to undertake placements in continental European settings as part of their professional development. Increasing the opportunities for the active exchange of ideas and practices will contribute towards practice development in England.

### **A world class workforce**

The aspirations of Care Matters demand a better quality Residential Child Care sector. Increasing expectations of what can be achieved in Residential Child Care settings necessitates a better educated and trained and higher qualified workforce. The challenge that has been posed is the creation of a world-class workforce. The underlying principles of Social Pedagogy resonate with many of the current developments taking place in England, for example, in relation to developing a more child-centred, holistic and integrated approach to work with children and young people. Incorporating the principles of Social Pedagogy into education, training and qualifications at all levels of the children's workforce would provide a catalyst for changing existing practice. For example, systematically reviewing the NVQ 3 'Working with Children and Young people' to assess its fitness for purpose in delivering the ECM outcomes and implementing the ambitious aims of Care Matters, would lead to incremental change. It would build upon a foundation of existing practice as demonstrated by both approaches to practice development in this report.

### **Innovation on a national platform**

This project is one of a number of initiatives which are contributing towards a climate of change in work with children and young people, particularly those who are looked after in Residential Child Care settings. It has prepared the ground for the larger initiative funded by the government. The national pilots are well placed to build on these experiences, developing the evidence base that demonstrates how Social Pedagogy can contribute towards professional practice that produces better outcomes for children and young people.

## **Note on Authors**

### **Eilen Bengtson, Pedagogue Supervisor Consultant within the Administration of Municipality of Gentofte, Denmark**

With over 14 years of in depth experience of working as a Social Pedagogue and manager in several Residential Child Care settings in Denmark, co authoring in a book describing social pedagogic approaches in Residential Child Care settings, having led a major development project for the City of Copenhagen's 32 Residential Child Care homes, and always attentive to how to contribute to bettering the lives of children and young people in need of extra support, it has been a pleasure to be part of this project.

### **Clare Chamberlain, NCERCC Associate. Project Manager**

Clare worked for 23 years in various Social Services departments in Leicester and London, initially working with adults with learning disabilities, but for the most part, in children's services. Ten years of this was in management positions, her last post as head of children and families in Islington, which she left in 2002.

From 2002–04 she worked at Voice (formerly Voice for the Child in Care) as the Project Director of an initiative known as 'Blueprint', which aimed to establish the components required for child centred care for children who are looked after. This project combined the knowledge and experience of children and young people using the service and child care professionals.

Since April 2004, Clare has worked as a freelance consultant undertaking various projects with local authorities, NCB and other child care organisations.

### **David Crimmens, Principal Lecturer, School of Health & Social Care, University of Lincoln**

David worked for over 20 years with children and young people on adventure playgrounds, playgroups, street corners, psychiatric units, as well as in intermediate treatment and residential care. He now works in higher education as a teacher and researcher. His primary interests are in marginality and social exclusion. His most recent publications are in children's rights and participation and Residential Child Care. He is a member of the editorial group of the European journal of social Work and a trustee of the Social education trust

### **Jonathan Stanley, Manager, National Centre for Excellence in Residential Child Care (NCERCC)**

Jonathan has worked in maintained, non-maintained and independent sectors managing residential and associated integrated provision (education, care, health) for national resources addressing the learning, emotional, and social needs of young people. He has provided training and consultancy on a wide range of subject areas to audiences, both specialised and mainstream seeking to bring the learning from one area for use in another.

Jonathan is the Manager of NCERCC, a major collaborative initiative to improve standards of practice and outcomes for children and young people in Residential Child Care in England.