

What is Social Pedagogy?

The identity of Social Pedagogy lies in its values and approaches to work with people. It has developed as a coherent modern profession over the last 50 years, and as an academic discipline, the theoretical foundation draws from related disciplines throughout the ages. These include: sociology, psychology, philosophy, education, medicine, politics and law. In addition, woven throughout is a lattice of practical and creative activities such as sport, outdoor activities and arts. This does not restrict the application of Social Pedagogy to so-called direct work, but rather prompts us to reconsider our approach to social interaction with service users in all dimensions of work in social care and social work.

As an approach with a humanist value-base, Social Pedagogy offers a coherent way of thinking and working across complex systems. The social pedagogical setting or practice is held within an institutional context, which in turn is part of the wider community and society, including the political context. Theory underpins practice, both practice and theory link to policy, and research informs all areas. In the words of Karl Mager (1844) “Social Pedagogy is the theory of all the personal, social and moral education in a given society, including the description of what has happened in practice.”¹

Social Pedagogy can be applied in any work setting in which the focus is to support individuals and/or groups. The approach enables staff to support children and adults alike in order to overcome challenging life situations, and social pedagogical leadership supports this work.

The aim is to initiate and support processes of empowerment, the creation of learning opportunities with trajectories to growth and wellbeing. Social Pedagogy simultaneously aims for more inclusive systems of community and society by effecting change within these systems. The Social Pedagogue works in this sense, not exclusively with the individuals or groups, but rather alongside them, in interaction with them and also acting within and on systems, be they institutional, community and/or societal. Part of the meaning of the “social” in Social Pedagogy is a solidarity with vulnerable and marginalised individuals and groups; a Social Pedagogue supports them, with the aim of reducing their vulnerability and marginalisation. In their work, Social Pedagogues use broadly educational means to achieve greater social justice.

Social Pedagogy practice is focussed on purposefully and reflectively building relationship with the service user and realising its potential. The relationship can be strengthened through social interaction, and joint activities deepen it. The Social Pedagogue steers this relationship and common activities in such a way that they result in genuine, positive experiences for the service user. As a result the service user learns and develops.

An important dimension of Social Pedagogy is to empower service users in a democratic way to achieve positive and lasting change. This is well described in the words of Chinese thinker and social philosopher, Confucius (551bc-479bc):

‘Tell me and I forget
Show me and I remember
Let me do and I understand’

¹ Winkler, M. (1988) Eine Theorie der Sozialpädagogik. Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta.

Social Pedagogy is mainly taught in continental Europe, with some degree programmes in the early stages of development in the UK. The Social Pedagogy qualification is gained via university studies over 3 to 4 years. University training offers a well-balanced blend of theory and practice and practical skills.

Jacaranda Development offers work-based training in Social Pedagogy, including accredited learning. We provide bolt-on services that support systemic development, which realise the efficacy of the investment in workforce development. Changes in beliefs and ways of doing do not occur in bubbles, nor solely on the front-line – research and learning theories clearly demonstrate the importance of a systems approach in fostering meaningful practice development.

What are the benefits for staff?

Training in Social Pedagogy supports and encourages the learning of professionals, including carers. Systemic support and consultancy ensure practice and organisational developments run in tandem.

Each training is tailored to the needs and setting of the participants' work and focuses on facilitating reflection. Through the use of social pedagogic methodology, participants gain further insight into their role and enhance their interactions with colleagues and others beyond, in the institution, community and society more widely.

One of the many opportunities provided by the training is that learners locate the theories that hide in tacit knowledge. Intuitive practice comes into reflective focus as newly learned theories and concepts are applied to trainees' practice. In turn, learners grow in confidence and develop an ability to apply theories to their practice and introduce them in professional discourse.

Learners find new ways of reaching joint goals with the service user via tangible methods and concepts which enhance the existing professional toolkit. An increased awareness of their potential as facilitators of development and their influence on service users is achieved. In addition, values and beliefs become explicit and often shift. Ways of thinking re-align themselves and so follows a change in ways of practicing, as learners move beyond their comfort zones and extend their learning zones.

"Some things you tell me I have already done with my child. I can now make a conscious decision on when I suggest what, and what the purpose is. I never thought that something as simple as playing a ball game can be so powerful and educational until I reflected on all the things this can trigger in a person." **Foster Carer - Head, Heart, Hands programme**

This quote illustrates the Social Pedagogy concept of The Common Third and demonstrates reflection, the application of theory, and education in its widest sense. We witness an empowerment as a result of the training as well as the strength-based approach of working with, and building on, existing good skills.

What are the benefits to service users?

Due to the centrality of relationship in the social pedagogic approach, which includes an unconditional positive regard for the individual, a service user experiences a more personalised belief in themselves as people, and in their capacities. This is achieved via an authentic relationship that is both professional and affectionate.

Evidence shows that service users develop a sense of self-responsibility and risk-competence, from which certain actions are triggered. Agency and self-efficacy are encouraged and supported and thereby provide trajectories to reaching potential.

For example, children living in a residential home who are consulted and are part of decorating the common room are much more likely to treat the interior with care rather than damaging it. This results in positive experiences and fewer negative consequences regarding damage, pride in showing the home to visitors, confidence in their own abilities, and so on.

As one of the focal points of Social Pedagogy lies in building and using the relationship between service user and professional, the effects of working with a social pedagogic approach can be anything between immediately obvious and unknown.

An effort is made to resist the belief that there can be a linear causality between a particular method and a particular outcome and that pre-defined outcomes are the only outcomes that count. A social pedagogic approach takes the service user themselves as the starting point for all measures of success and as such narratives and stories offer great insight into benefits. Incremental steps are taken in the work of Social Pedagogy with the aim that a service user gains independence and trust in being supported by the immediate community.

Social Pedagogy provides a common language and works towards shared understandings. The resultant coherence within systems is something we are told time and again by service users is highly desirable and its absence at the outset of a programme of Social Pedagogy development a cause of considerable frustration.

Social Pedagogy is a safe and caring approach to working with people that aims to achieve a non-stigmatised sense of belonging to community and society. It is this, particularly from children in care and young people who have left care, that we hear is the most highly prized outcome of all. A young person who misses a school trip with friends when a booking deadline is missed because permission requests float through a system designed to support her, says, *"I just wanted a normal life."*²

What are the benefits to an organisation?

There are significant synergies between a social pedagogic approach and the fundamental goals of the Troubled Families agenda, the Munro recommendations for children's Social Work, person-centred approaches in adult social care and desired ways of working in early years. Latterly, the Association of Directors of Children's Services has suggested consideration of Social Pedagogy as a consistent and holistic approach to work with children in care.

Social Pedagogy provides an ethical, theoretically underpinned framework that leads to a change in practice that is consistent with an organisation's strategic and ethical priorities.

In developing Social Pedagogy in a multi-layered manner, an organisation stands to achieve the benefits of strengthening staff teams, improving organisational communication and (re-)igniting a passion to continue personal and professional development to the benefit of service users. The process highlights values and sees them aligned to strategic priorities; practice is in turn aligned to those values and strategic priorities.

Some organisations with which we have worked report perceptible improved wellbeing amongst service users, increased engagement in activities and education, increased morale of staff, reduced damage (children's homes) and thereby reduced costs, reduced staff sickness and thereby reduced cost of staff cover. Please ask us for referees.

² A young person who has left care, member of a Social Pedagogy development Steering Group

What can Jacaranda offer?

- The benefit of our expertise and experience in a number of transformational projects.
- In consultation and in partnership, we identify strategic organisational objectives and pathways to achieve them, planning our work with these goals in mind. We offer a range of options with the goal of developing social pedagogic practice in teams and a social pedagogic ethos within the organisation. The latter increases the efficacy significantly.
- Our approach is reflective and facilitative, guided by the goal of empowerment and with the aim of enabling lasting change.
- Work-based training in a variety of formats and groupings that meet your organisational needs e.g. 8 days staff team/group training; 1 day introductory workshops; large-scale awareness-raising events; workshops for managers; courses for change-agents and so on.
- All trainers are fully qualified Social Pedagogues and UK work-experienced
- Level 4 (40 credits) accredited module in partnership with the University of the West of England.
- Recruitment of Social Pedagogues embedded in the organisation and a range of linked support measures.
- Project management/facilitation, including expertise in processes of change.
- Mentoring and one-to-one support
- Field trips to see Social Pedagogy in action.
- Momentum projects and keeping-in-touch days

Our credentials

For 10 years we have been involved in Social Pedagogy development.

We have recruited Social Pedagogues for:

- The Department for Education Social Pedagogy pilot project
- The Head, Heart, Hands programme led by the Fostering Network
- Staffordshire County Council
- The London Borough of Hackney
- Many more organisations throughout the UK

“This was a really positive experience for us. It’s such an excellent way to get to know the people applying for these vital roles with our most vulnerable children and young people. By using this approach we were able to create better opportunities to see the ‘person behind the professional persona’. This enabled us to explore a range of criteria that was far broader and deeper than our traditional approaches to recruitment.” **Staffordshire County Council**

We have developed Social Pedagogy in training with:

- Derbyshire County Council. See: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FaoU7cuHStw>
- Suffolk County Council, children's centres and children's homes
- The Fostering Network's Head, Heart, Hands programme with the London Borough of Hackney and Surrey County Council

We support the wider development of Social Pedagogy in our involvement in the Centre for Understanding of Social Pedagogy development group, the Social Pedagogy Development Network and by funding the website www.SocialPedagogyUK.com

