

Celebrating the Achievements of *Head, Heart, Hands*

An Open Letter from the Social Pedagogy Consortium

Dear friends and colleagues,

At the end of the *Head, Heart, Hands* programme we, as members of the Social Pedagogy Consortium, want to send greetings to all its participants and all who showed a lively interest in it. We want to thank you for your contribution to its many successes and hope you've found the experience as valuable as we have, as delivery partners with The Fostering Network. With them, we set out, four years ago, to demonstrate the practical and theoretical value of social pedagogy for UK foster carers and their young people.

Over that time, our appreciation both of fostering and of the potential of social pedagogy for the UK has grown. It has been a complex programme: Several hundred people were involved, with many different roles, duties and perspectives, not to mention a wide variety of settings. These ranged from the intensely rural to the inner city, from the South of England to the far North of Scotland. Unsurprisingly, such differences presented challenges for this national programme, but they also gave opportunities for learning and contributed much to the richness of the programme.

From our point of view, *Head, Heart, Hands* was stimulating, hugely interesting, intense, demanding, challenging, rewarding, and often a lot of fun – perhaps many of you felt the same. In each site the programme set up learning and development courses mainly involving foster carers but also social workers and other personnel. It was an opportunity for all to share in the same learning experience and to develop a common language about the work and the young people they had responsibility for. We found that most participants were very appreciative of this opportunity.

Many foster carers said that their confidence in relating to the children had increased and they shared inspiring examples of how the children were benefitting. For these foster carers, social pedagogy wasn't just 'good practice', it was about developing a new perspective on the work, finding ways into more reflective practice and valuing their own contribution more highly. They often told us how they'd found creative ways of building relationships and of sharing family life with their foster children. They also said that the programme had enabled them to react differently – and successfully – when difficulties arose, because they could adapt their learning to their own situations. When they needed to speak up for young people in the outside world, they now felt better able to professionally challenge, request change and discuss issues with other professionals, as confident members of the team around the child. Developing confident team work is just one aspect of social pedagogy that is different from many other approaches.

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We found it very impressive that most of the foster carers involved, the five local authorities and the two independent providers stayed with the programme through its highs and lows. Also, as a result of the programme, a number of strong advocates for social pedagogy have emerged, who continue their learning and development with great dedication.

We want to thank and congratulate The Fostering Network for undertaking *Head, Heart, Hands* and all of you have worked so hard to make it a success. Now, we're looking forward to new growth that will enable the achievements and learning of *Head, Heart, Hands* to live on across the UK. The Social Pedagogy Professional Association (SPPA) will launch in 2017, and Ofqual-recognised qualifications, now in development, will follow. There will be opportunities for people who have already undertaken courses in social pedagogy to take their existing learning forward to accreditation at Diploma level.

Individual and organisational membership of SPPA will be open to different professionals working with people across the age range. To begin with, SPPA will have a home in UCL Institute of Education (see www.sppa-uk.org) before it stands on its own feet in 2019. We warmly invite foster carers, among many other occupations, to help us make SPPA a vibrant community of practice, creating change such as that which resulted from *Head, Heart, Hands*.

We are looking forward to meeting and working with many of you in the future,

Abby, Thure, Manuel, Kristina, Pat, Robyn, Sylvia, Andy, Alex, Charlotte, Gabriel and Christina



Head, Heart, Hands site and programme team at Orkney practice group, 20-21 July, 2015

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What is Social Pedagogy?

Social pedagogy was defined in the early nineteenth century as a field for theory, policy and practice. It is sometimes referred to as *education in its broadest* sense in that, unlike much formal education, it takes a holistic view, seeking to support physical, emotional, intellectual and social wellbeing, and to promote social agency and resilience. The phrase *Head, Heart and Hands* signifies this holistic approach. In public policy, social pedagogy refers to measures that take such a broadly educational approach to social issues. It is also an academic field in its own right, with its own theories as well as drawing on those from disciplines such as psychology and sociology. Social pedagogy is a recognised profession in much of Europe, with social pedagogues working across a wide age range. The ethics of today's social pedagogy are based in democratic and emancipatory values, and it prizes opportunities for cooperation.

A frequent response to descriptions of social pedagogic practice, whatever the setting referred to, is: Isn't that just 'good practice'? This misses how social pedagogy can help develop good practice throughout a service by providing common understandings and building on existing strengths. Social pedagogy learning and development offers:

- ▶ An ethos informed by values relating to human equality and respect, whether for colleagues or the people who use a service. Social pedagogic practice is based on building relationships and valuing dialogue and joint activity. At the same time social pedagogy encourages a critical awareness of the operations of society and its institutions.
- ▶ Recognition of people's existing and potential strengths, rather than turning to a deficit model. Allied to this is an appreciation of human creativity and the significance of the different sorts of contributions people can make to improve social life, whether through activity or dialogue.
- ▶ Reflection that leads to appropriate action is an essential element of social pedagogic practice: a democratic ethos is not in itself sufficient. Social pedagogy offers concepts and models which provide a framework for reflection. These feed into practice, both at the everyday level and when more challenging circumstances arise.
- ▶ An understanding that, in the light of reflection, practitioners adapt their approach according to specific contexts, rather than being overly tied to procedure or habitual response.
- ▶ An understanding of people as socially, as well as psychologically, situated and that both factors inform how we view the world and our place in it.

Overall, social pedagogy seeks to support human development and promote social justice through activities which are mostly small scale and everyday, but which also have an eye to the larger social picture as well as to individual circumstances.

To learn more about social pedagogy, please check out our short videos at vimeo.com/channels/socialpedagogychannel or visit www.jacaranda-recruitment.co.uk or www.thempra.org.uk

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The Social Pedagogy Consortium

The Social Pedagogy Consortium is a collective of organisations and people with shared values and approaches to the development of social pedagogy in the UK and Ireland. We work both independently and collaboratively with the aim of furthering the understanding and practice of social pedagogy. Currently the SPC is comprised of ThemPra Social Pedagogy, Jacaranda Development and Professor Pat Petrie of UCL, Institute of Education.

Within *Head, Heart, Hands*, we contributed to the development, set-up (including the assessment and selection of sites and recruitment of the sites' social pedagogues) and running of the programme by: writing the learning and development programme, including creating materials and facilitating the courses; working with the central programme team nationally; and supporting each site in developing social pedagogy strategically.

Central to this role was building and maintaining strong professional relationships with site project teams. Alongside the guidance from local social pedagogues, we provided formal and informal support to the site team, supporting their reflections and planning, including any necessary local adaptations. SPC site support leads also engaged site stakeholders in obtaining further long-term support for social pedagogy. Importantly, we aimed at an appropriate level of coherence and consistency across the programme, taking into account variance in the local contexts and the professional background and practice cultures of the employed social pedagogues. We were in frequent, regular contact with the site teams, locally contextualised, for: monthly pedagogical supervision for the social pedagogues; attending site strategy/steering groups and other programme development meetings; guidance on developing social pedagogic materials; developing and (co)-facilitating other programme-related courses.

Nationally, the SPC sought to support The Fostering Network in developing their understanding of social pedagogy and the application of social pedagogy in fostering. This included a two-day social pedagogy introduction course. The SPC liaised regularly with the central programme team remotely, and face-to-face, for coordination and programme development. We also participated in programme learning network meetings, which brought together site project teams, the SPC and The Fostering Network. An SPC member served on the *Head, Heart, Hands* Programme and Advisory Boards.

In addition to being delivery partner in the *Head, Heart, Hands* programme, we're also working together on *Scaling Up Social Pedagogy* (led by UCL Institute of Education, 2016 – 2019). The project includes the development of social pedagogy standards, the set-up of the Social Pedagogy Professional Association (SPPA) and the development of a Level 3 and Level 5 qualifications in social pedagogy. Since 2009, we have also been co-ordinating the *Social Pedagogy Development Network* (SPDN), a grassroots, bi-annual, free-to-attend forum for people interested in social pedagogy.

Find out more about our work and how we support organisations in developing social pedagogy:

www.jacaranda-recruitment.co.uk | www.thempra.org.uk | www.sppa-uk.org

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