

OF INTEREST

- Many thank to all the contributors to this edition which highlights the work of our Virtual School. To find out more about their work visit: <http://bit.ly/1SroP4G>
- New dates for the 2 day introduction to social pedagogy course are available running monthly through this coming year. For more info email Jackie.mee@derbyshire.gov.uk or cathy.barrass@derbyshire.gov.uk
- Saturday 5th March, Social Pedagogy for Approved Foster Carers'. Development sessions led by Foster Carers. To book contact: Clare Freeman, 01629 538427, clare.freeman@derbyshire.gov.uk

IN THIS ISSUE:

Social Pedagogy: with Partners 1

Residential Holidays for Children in Care 2

From being inspired to hopefully inspiring 3

University social pedagogy course 3

ESOs Supporting young people's education 4

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Social Pedagogy and working with Partners The Virtual School & Chatsworth House

What is this partnership about?

A few years ago a partnership was struck up between Chatsworth House and the Uni-fi Initiative which was exploring ways of improving the services we offer to the children and young people in our care. Chatsworth were generously offering us the opportunity to enjoy their facilities and give us the chance to visit the house and gardens for free. This offer was greatly appreciated but what we also wanted to do was build a richer way of working together with the Virtual School so that the benefits would be experienced by all working at or attending the project days at Chatsworth. This way our joint endeavours would hopefully be more sustainable and add value to what both organisations were aiming to achieve in improving outcomes in their work with young people. As Virtual school we definitely work

using our 'head, heart, and hands' and it is good



...all the activities involve everyone doing, playing, being together.

to share this way of being not only across the authority but with our outside partners and agencies.

How does Social Pedagogy influence and inform the partnership?

The project days we have developed are created with learning at the heart of what we do – everyone learning together, so young people are always encouraged to come along with their carers, siblings, social workers, mentors etc. and all the activities involve everyone doing/playing/being together. I suppose this is

what we would call 'The Common Third' in SP terms – making sure that everyone gets involved and that no one ends up just as an observer or supervisor of what's going on. Sharing life experiences is such an important part of what SP is about and we make sure that stays right at the heart of what we do in this partnership. We recognise that relationships are really important so we make sure that planning and communication are given special attention so that both sides of the partnership have a good understanding of what we are bringing to each other's worlds of work but also what we are bringing to each other as professionals and people.



Residential Holidays for Children in Care:

Reflections by Helen Pridmore, Assistant Head Virtual School



"Through these experiences we meet our children on a level and from that grows more joint understanding..."



It can be hard to reach our children – not just physically but to engage with them, to understand them and to offer them the sort of support they really need. We see one version of them in school and maybe a different version of them in their foster or residential placement. We get snap shots rather than a broader view. Why should children tell us what they think and open themselves up to us when they hardly know us? They have so many adults in their lives and some have been a great let-down or even a danger to them.

We put on events so we can meet the children in a different environment but they generally aren't well-attended. Derbyshire is a large county and to find a venue that suits the majority is a real challenge when many will still have a long way to travel. Then we have the 'chicken and egg' situation of

children not wanting to attend a day's activity because they won't know anyone. Once they do know some of the other children, they are usually much more confident and enthusiastic to join in.

A residential activity makes a long journey more worth the effort. We can draw in those children with placements out of county too for whom a day trip would be impractical. But more than that there is something very special about a 'sleep-over' (or an 'over' would be a more accurate description!). There is something very personal about living alongside a child for a few days. We are rewarded with glimpses of who they really are, what their interests are, what they are scared of and what makes them laugh. Some open up as we work and play on activities together with talk of birth families, what it's like to be in

Care (the good and the bad) and what they feel their future holds.

On the residential, we all get wet and cold, we all get hungry and tired and we all have times of fear and elation. Through these experiences we meet our children on a level and from that grows more joint understanding and engagement. Children can experience being with others who are in a similar situation to themselves and are in a safe place to discuss hopes and worries and can work at making sense of what has happened to them. It's an environment where all can succeed, where little-known skills can be drawn out and appreciated and where children can just be children for a while.

And when we next see that child in school, we believe we can reach them more effectively.

Social Pedagogy and working with Partners...continued

What do we actually do?

All of our projects involve collaborative learning where adults and young people are sharing experiences – on days together we have: explored the grounds and play park, made scented playdoh, done sensory treasure hunts, built huge dens out of natural materials, explored resilience in creative and crafty ways, read and told each other stories, taken part in blind-folded tours

around the grounds, learned about the different areas of Chatsworth as a business, shared knowledge and ideas – laughed a lot, worked in teams, got dirty, shared picnics and best of all was grooming the guinea pigs!

What does everyone get out of it?

Through working together we all learn from each other. We help Chatsworth staff gain valuable knowledge about how we work with vulnerable young people – things like lan-

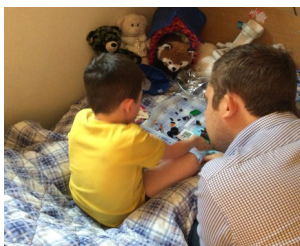
guage development, sensory play, how to use the environment as a learning experience etc. In return we get to utilise their fantastic facilities to design enriching and stimulating learning experiences for the children and all those who care for them.

Spending time working with the family groups allows us to build closer working relationships so that people feel they understand the Virtual School better and they can then feel comfortable about asking for our support for the education of the children they look after.

Exploring resilience in creative and crafty ways...'best of all was grooming the guinea pigs!'



Shane Howson: From being inspired to hopefully inspiring others



"Social Pedagogy gave me a secure mast to nail my educational belief colours to."

My introduction to Social Pedagogy as a 'thing' came in September 2014, after being fortunate enough to take up a position in Derbyshire's Virtual School. I had moved from an Education Welfare role working across two of Derbyshire County Council's Multi-Agency Teams and had previously worked as a classroom teacher in another local authority.

During the initial introductions to Social Pedagogy, I found myself struggling to fully understand. It was much easier to grasp what Social Pedagogy was not. It was not the latest initiative in the endless cycle of educational initiatives. It was also not a new concept, dreamt up for us to see if it had a place to be successful. What was clear was that whatever Social Pedagogy was, it had gained momentum around the world, had its success backed up by considerable hard evidence and was inspirational to those putting it forward.

The more I discussed with those delivering training and involved in the Social Pedagogy movement, the more I realised something. Social Pedagogy, and the tools to work in this way successfully, was something I had always believed and had in-

creasingly been doing in my work. However, what I had been doing was in small parts and almost by accident. Social Pedagogy had the research, the planning and the delivery to consciously and deliberately choose the specific way of working to achieve greater success. Fundamentally, Social Pedagogy gave me a secure mast to nail my educational belief colours to. It is like planting rather than randomly scattering seeds where only some will get enough sunlight. Concentrating only on the number of seeds rather than planning how best to support each plant, is counterproductive. Social Pedagogy is not about working harder, it is about working smarter!

This gave me a huge amount of enthusiasm for Social Pedagogy. I was engaging with conversations and I was finding that I was beginning to think about specific concepts when working with young people. I am very lucky to be led by people who also believe in the merits of Social Pedagogy. So when planning direct work with young people, for example, I have been given the freedom to invest time early on, developing a relationship, before expecting to see a specific result. It has been energising to see where careful thought about an approach has paid dividends.

When the opportunity was offered to be part of the Social Pedagogy team delivering to, and learning from, colleagues across Derbyshire I was keen

to be involved. There are a wide range of benefits from being involved, and I am eager to continue my development and support in the development of others. Part of my training was, of course, to attend the two-day course. A number of factors both impressed me and further secured my enthusiasm. Firstly, the content and delivery of the course was exceptional. There was no power-point reading, no heavy theory and no perception that those attending the course were passive learners. Everyone appeared to feel valued and that they had a positive contribution to make. The course was broken up in to sections with different approaches, which never left me feeling overloaded or needing to 'switch off'. Crucially, the course practiced what it preached!

Secondly, it was hugely beneficial to have people from different areas working together. I found that having social workers, foster carers, family support workers and so on all together broadened both the debate and understanding far more than had the group been from any one background.

I look forward to being given the opportunity to deliver Social Pedagogy training across Derbyshire in the New Year. If I am able to make a fraction of the impact on others that has been made on me then I will be delighted and the growth of effective Social Pedagogical approaches across Derbyshire will continue.

University social pedagogy course is continuing.

Another 25 workers from across our Children's Service have just started the next course at the University of Derby 'An Introduction to Social Pedagogy' whilst the former 25 are now in the final assignment stage of their

course and should hear the results very shortly.

The New Group started in January this year and two further opportunities to access this course will be promoted in the summer.

Everyone's hard work on the course had made it a real success and we hope more staff will take up this great opportunity. You can register your interest by emailing...

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**"Working together to support and inspire
children, young people and their families to
be the best they can be; safe, health,
happy, learning and working."**

Stay in touch

If you have any comments about the gazette or would like to know more about the development of social pedagogy please feel free to get in touch. Also do make contact if you would like to highlight your own or colleagues work developing social pedagogy.

Disclaimer: we hope this provides useful and relevant information, but we cannot guarantee that all source documents referred to have been checked and verified. We cannot accept responsibility for actions or omissions taken after reading this bulletin. Nothing in this bulletin is intended as a substitute for expert, professional or legal advice.



Social pedagogy and supporting young people in education

Having positive relationships with the young people is paramount to them being able to succeed in their learning experiences. Trusting that you will be there for them and will not be negative, even if they fail, helps them to start to realise that we can work together.

As an Education Support Officer (ESO) in the Virtual School I have been using art as the common third activity with a young year 8 man, also in residential care, initially at a support centre and now in mainstream school. The sessions are an opportunity for him to explore his love of art and also for me to offer mentoring to enable him to deal with issues that may arise throughout his educational and social life.

He is given the opportunity to decide on the activity and the sessions are a time for issues to be explored together while focussing on an agreed activity and also a time to build an effective relationship.

"When two people undertake an activity together the focus is on the task rather than directly on each other, creating a more relaxed atmosphere." (Lihme, 1988).

On one occasion I arrived to find the young man in the Head of Years office, in a very frustrated state, he was sat at a table facing away from the Head of Year and his Teaching Assistant (TA). I had walked into the war zone and was not aware of the frustrating events of the morning.

The Head of Year explained that the young man had had a difficult morning and both her and the TA were feeling extremely let down by his actions. After some discussion and coaxing on my part they both left the room and I explained to the young man that when he was ready he should come and join me, as I set up the activity as normal.

He trusted that I would not rush him and would give him the time he needed. Through the course of the activity we ended up having an amazing session and were able to discuss his version of the morning and other ways he could have dealt with his issues. When I first arrived he would not have been emotionally settled but through our positive relationship, his trust in me and me in him, it enabled us to work through the issues and find a way together to move forward.

As social pedagogy practitioners we should first make sure that we ourselves are in the right place to offer support. If we are not mentally, emotionally or physically well, then we are not going to be able to offer any positive input.

Building positive relationships means that the young people can be supported in making positive decisions and problem solving. Within the key principles of Social Pedagogy it is important to provide support holistically looking to the child's overall development through using traditional educational methods and artistic or creative methods.

Thanks to Sandra Sharpe (m) and colleagues Stef Smith (l) and Hannah Cooke (r) for their time.

