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**Introducing social pedagogy into Scottish  
residential child care:  
An evaluation of the Sycamore Services social  
pedagogy training programme**

1st stage evaluation

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## 1. Introduction and context

This report provides an introduction to the approach to child care known as social pedagogy and an evaluation of a social pedagogy training programme delivered to a group of child care staff employed in Sycamore Services. It is a 1st stage evaluation which gathers information from participants during the training programme and over the first few months following the training. This was a pilot programme and the Sycamore Services management have decided that the programme will be run again, and will eventually be offered to all staff. A further evaluation will be carried out in order to identify benefit and impact one year on from the end of the pilot.

The training of residential staff has been a major challenge and the issue of what sort of training is most appropriate has long been contested. Since the early 1990s a few residential staff have been trained in social work, however retention of these staff has been difficult. Numerous voices have suggested that social pedagogy might be a fruitful avenue, including Norman Warner in his review of staff selection (Warner, 1992) and Roger Kent in his review of safeguards for children in residential care (Kent, 1997). In its recent *Care Matters: Time for change*, white paper (DfES 2007), the Government in England sought to create the basis for significant improvements in 'outcomes' for young people in the care system. Included in the white paper was a proposal for the establishment of a pilot social pedagogy development programme using social pedagogues recruited onto the staff of children's homes in various parts of England. This programme will run from 2008 - 2010, using social pedagogues recruited from various European countries, and is being independently evaluated.

Numerous academics and professionals, including the present writer, have advocated the potential of social pedagogy to provide a sound foundation for achieving the professionalization and 'upskilling' of residential and other direct care staff who work with children and families (Milligan, 1998; Crimmens, 1999; Cameron 2004; Cohen et al., 2003). An increasing number of child care organisations and educational institutions are now developing pilot programmes of various kinds. In 2007 a charitable organisation funded a pilot programme of training and mentoring for residential workers in two regions of England (Bengtsson et al. 2008).

### *Other recent developments include:*

- Danish pedagogy students on 6 month placements in English children's services were highly praised by their English supervisors. Reportedly, they accommodated well to existing modes of practice, they developed excellent relationships with children and staff, and they were creative. They were frequently allowed to undertake responsibilities beyond the normal remit of placement students. Some students were said to promote a questioning culture about practice and procedures, which was seen by staff as beneficial to institutional practice overall. (Cameron, 2007)
- A UK agency, specialising in recruitment of German pedagogues, has placed over 200 qualified practitioners in local authorities and other agencies, on permanent contracts. (Ladbrooke, 2007)
- The Institute of Education (part of the University of London) has just developed a 1-year *MA Social Pedagogy: working with children and young people in or on the edge of care*. [http://www.ioe.ac.uk/study/masters/PMM9\\_CYP9IM.html](http://www.ioe.ac.uk/study/masters/PMM9_CYP9IM.html)
- Essex County Council has adopted a social pedagogic approach across all its children's homes, and is providing a training and development programme for all its residential staff.

In 2008 the Head of Sycamore services invited two German pedagogues who had previously delivered training to residential staff in England to develop and deliver a training programme for a pilot group comprising 16 staff. These staff work across the range of Sycamore Services and include foster-carers, education and family support workers although the largest number (9 out of 16) were residential workers.

## The Trainers

### *Sylvia Holthoff*

Sylvia completed her studies of pedagogy for people with special needs in Germany in 1997. Since then she has gained experience in residential care, youth work, environmental education and in international projects. She has qualified as a trainer for experiential outdoor activities and the high and low ropes. In connection with the project "CrossBoarders - Environmental Education for German and Polish Youngsters with Special Abilities", she has published a practice guide. Sylvia is currently a freelance trainer and facilitates training for social pedagogues, teachers, and others. She is interested in finding appropriate methods to promote a holistic learning approach.

### *Gabriel Eichsteller*

Gabriel has studied social pedagogy, social work and sociology of childhood in Germany, Denmark, and the UK. In his home country Germany, Gabriel gained experience and inspiration by working for a play bus, a local children's bureau, and for the Centre for Childhood and Adolescence Studies at the Protestant University of Applied Sciences Freiburg. For Portsmouth Youth Service he compared British youth work with pedagogic concepts of working with children and young people. Gabriel managed two participation projects for The Children's Society in South London and facilitated the pilot social pedagogy training as an associate for the National Centre for Excellence in Residential Child Care.

Due to the increasing interest in social pedagogy training across the UK Sylvia and Gabriel and others have formed a new community interest company, 'ThemPra: where theory meets practice'. Information can be found at their website: <http://social-pedagogy.co.uk/index.htm>

## 2. Sycamore Services

### *Sycamore services*

Sycamore Services is part of the Aberlour Child Care Trust. The Service started out as a single residential unit which opened at 44 Whytemans Brae in Kirkcaldy in June 1983. The organisation's website offers the following description:

Sycamore offers a quality therapeutic environment for young people who have experienced trauma and loss.

Sycamore Services comprises of Residential Services, Fostering Service, Sycamore School, Creative Therapies, Support Services, Throughcare/ Aftercare and Befriending Scheme.

All the work of Sycamore is governed by a philosophy that recognises and demonstrates the value and worth of human beings. The Service offers and emphasises the opportunity for growth and development as opposed to the containment, control and rejection which many of the young people have experienced.

### *The Sycamore way*

Since setting up the service Tim Foley (Head of Sycamore Services) has sought to develop a consistent values-based culture across the organisation; and this has been done through the development of an organisational 'philosophy'; known as the Sycamore Way. This is a humanistic approach to practice and management which provides an over-arching guide for staff, with the aim of ensuring that all relationships and transactions within the organisation are characterised by respect for persons. Tim has asked of his staff that all their activity, not only their direct work with children, be conducted in a way that values individuals and which manages tensions and conflicts in a respectful manner. The Sycamore care philosophy which underpins the work with children, and informs the training of the staff, is based on the principle of accepting each child or young person as a unique individual who is valued. A key aspect of the philosophy is the idea that while children's behaviours will often be destructive, including self-harmful, staff are encouraged to interpret and understand behaviour first of all and not to respond in a reactive or punitive way.

### *Training and consultancy*

The management of Sycamore Services place a great deal of emphasis on training its staff and on overall service development. The staff group has a low rate of turnover and many of the staff have professional-level qualifications. Each year several of the project's own staff will be undertaking the BA in Social Work through the SIRCC distance-learning route provided by Robert Gordon University. The project is also a major provider of placements to students on professional social work courses. Large numbers of main-grade staff have the HNC in Social Care/SVQ3 award which enables them to have full registration with the Scottish Social Services Council and others are working towards these qualifications. Furthermore Sycamore has a high level of in-house, in-service training courses. In recent years there has been a strong focus on training around the use of 'dyadic developmental psychotherapy approaches' in order to support the use of attachment work as developed by Dan Hughes (2006).

The Service makes considerable use of a group of consultants who advise the management team on a range of matters and provide on-going consultancy to residential unit staff teams and managers.

The extensive nature of Sycamore's investment in training, and the numbers of staff involved in training in any one year is noted here in order to provide a context for the evaluation of the social pedagogy programme. Staff are accustomed to both regular in-service and professional-level training and therefore have a good basis for evaluating new training programmes, both for content and delivery.

The Service funds regular independent evaluations of its services; most recently these have included an evaluation of a unit for younger children in Dunfermline ('No.6'). The following extract from the Summary provides some confirmation of the positive nature of the organisation's ethos and the favourable views of external stakeholders:

*The Unit and Sycamore staff expressed a high level of personal and collective commitment to their work and described, warm, caring relationships with children. The commitment of staff and the relationships that staff developed with children who were vulnerable and traumatised emerged as a significant factor in the Unit's work in improving outcomes for the children. External professionals spoke positively of the Unit, its staff and the impact the service had on children. (Elsley, 2006)*

Tim and his senior management team have been aware of the European tradition of social pedagogy and have hoped that it might become introduced into Scotland in some way. Recently they welcomed a social pedagogy student from Denmark who is undergoing one of her practice placements at Sycamore. Given the recent developments the Head of Service engaged in discussions with the two social pedagogues from Germany who have been active in training residential staff in various parts of England (Sylvia Holthoff and Gabriel Eichsteller). Following these initial discussions, these trainers proposed a programme which was adopted and implemented for a multi-disciplinary group of Sycamore staff between September 2008 and January 2009.

### 3. Understanding the concept of social pedagogy and the practices associated with such an approach.

#### What is social pedagogy and where do social pedagogues work?

Cannan et al. (1992) defined social pedagogy as:

*a perspective, including social action which aims to promote human welfare through child-rearing and education practices; and to prevent or ease social problems by providing people with the means to manage their own lives, and make changes in their circumstances (Cannan et al., 1992: 73).*

Social pedagogy in practice is a holistic and personal approach to child care in all its forms, which links education and care, and support for families. Social pedagogy offers an approach to training at various levels which integrates education, child care and social care with a focus on supporting families and promoting children's rights.

*Social pedagogues already work across Europe in a wide range of services, including the early years, schools, residential care, family support and youth work, disability services, and in some countries support for older people. They work alongside the more established professions such as teachers, social workers, doctors and nurses. Pedagogues are seen to complement and enhance the more traditionally established professions. (Children in Scotland, 2008).*

The following extract comes from the work of a group of staff at the Thomas Coram Research Unit (TCRU) in London who have undertaken extensive research into social pedagogy and its relevance to the training and development of 'early years' and residential care staff in the UK (Petrie et al. 2009):

#### The terms pedagogy and social pedagogy

Social pedagogy is sometimes used to mean pedagogy conducted on behalf of society, rather than the more private pedagogy performed by parents. But the term can also denote work with more vulnerable groups in society. Different countries have different emphases and use slightly different terms.

The system's components consist of policy and practice, theory and research, and the training and education of the work force, with each component feeding into, and drawing from, the others.

#### TCRU research identified the following key principles of pedagogic practice:

- A focus on the child as a whole person, and support for the child's overall development.
- The practitioner seeing herself/himself as a person, in relationship with the child or young person.
- While they are together, children and staff are seen as inhabiting the same life space, not as existing in separate, hierarchical domains.
- As professionals, pedagogues are encouraged to constantly reflect on their practice and to apply both theoretical understandings and self-knowledge to their work and to the sometimes challenging demands with which they are confronted.
- Pedagogues should be both practical and creative; their training prepares them to share in many aspects of children's daily lives, such as preparing meals and snacks, or making music and building kites.
- In group settings, children's associative life is seen as an important resource: workers should foster and make use of the group.



- Pedagogy builds on an understanding of children's rights that is not limited to procedural matters or legislative requirements.
- There is an emphasis on team work and valuing the contributions of others — family members, other professionals and members of the local community — in the task of 'bringing up' children.

The work of the pedagogue is essentially personal. The students and staff, interviewed for recent TCRU research on the applicability of social pedagogy to work with looked-after children, often spoke of the work of the pedagogue in terms of the human person: head, hands and heart —all three being essential for the work of pedagogy.

The personal, relational approach is emphasised in students' training and education, where fostering sound pedagogic values and attitudes is seen as at least as important as the acquisition of knowledge and skills.

Pedagogic principles derive from a highly developed professional training and education, and relate to social policy that is conceived in terms of pedagogy; for example pedagogic principles can be brought to bear in cases where children are also a concern for youth justice systems. (Petrie et al., 2009: 3-4).

### **Social pedagogy and UK traditions of social work**

As with UK social work, social pedagogy has a strong emphasis on working with families, and working in partnership with parents. Where children are in care, the pedagogues are expected to work with families as well as the child. Foster-carers are often offered elements of social pedagogy training, or may themselves be trained social pedagogues. Such staff work at helping children maintain links and to return home where possible. As they are trained in a range of practical skills (games, sports, arts and creative activities in general) and in specific methods of working, pedagogues would usually be expected to work with families, in the sense of encouraging parents to develop parenting skills, and supporting parents to resolve difficulties in managing their children. It can be seen from this that the pedagogue role has some similarities to residential workers, except that pedagogues are trained to engage fully with families. In Europe children in care and families would still have social workers, with similar roles to the UK (for example, assessment and case management) but the pedagogue is available to undertake work in identified areas.

### ***Reflective practice***

Reflective practice is seen as a major element in social pedagogy training, as it is in the UK in social work and other professions. This involves workers being trained to reflect on what they are doing, and why, and linking theory to practice. In teamwork situations pedagogues are expected to reflect with each other; giving feedback and suggestions to one another. It is a notable feature of recent social pedagogy initiatives in the UK that both foreign social pedagogues and British staff notice that the British system of care seems to be dominated by concerns about risk and 'safeguarding procedures' rather than on confident relationship-based practice (Bengtsson 2008: 4). In contrast pedagogues seem to have both the training and a professional environment which supports greater self-confidence about managing relationships and risk. The recent review of social work in Scotland (Roe 2006) recognised that social workers often felt weighed down by procedures and recommended among other things that social workers should be afforded greater autonomy.

### ***Personal care and professional relationships***

Social pedagogues are trained to have authentic and mutual relationships with the children and young people with whom they work, while using the relationship to work purposefully and therapeutically, in the broadest sense. One of the differences of emphasis that seems to make this approach attractive to

residential workers who have taken part in the English pilots, is that it affirms the positive care role of the worker, as opposed to the very risk-averse-dominated UK approach, which seems to view personal relationships as potentially suspect. In contrast the pedagogues are expected to manage their relationships and use them positively and professionally.

The use of the relationship seems to be an aspect of social pedagogy which is different in some degree to the way that professional relationships are understood and have evolved within a UK social work context. Two particular conceptual frameworks have been well-received by participants in UK pilots so far.

- 1. Head, hand and heart:** the idea that the worker is supposed to engage in all domains; practical skills and activities (hands), thinking critically and analytically (head), and recognising and affirming the place of emotions, feelings of care and concern (heart). Within social pedagogy aspects associated with 'heart' are recognised as crucial to the care and development of the child, rather than being seen as risky and to be avoided.
- 2. The '3 Ps': Private, personal and professional:** another conceptual device used by some of the pedagogue trainers is acknowledging different aspects of the self: private, personal and professional. Again the distinction between the private (the part of you which you generally do not share with service users or bring to work), and the personal part which you do share and bring to work, seems to be helpful. It enables residential workers to see a valid theoretical basis for the 'personal' aspects of the job.

The following comment comes from the evaluation of an English pilot project involving German and Danish pedagogues working with a number of residential staff in either training or mentoring roles:

*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'. (Bengtsson et al., 2008: 3-4)*

### **Purposeful use of activities**

Another marked feature of social pedagogy, and one which distinguishes it from British social work, is the emphasis on the use of activities; both outdoor recreational activities and sports, and 'indoor' recreation using all types of creative activities. During their training social pedagogues will spend considerable amounts of time learning to use a wide range of creative and recreational activities with children and young people. The social pedagogues are not expected to be experts in any activity but rather to be willing to use their interest to engage with children as part of the care process. A conceptual device which captures this element of practice is the 'common third':

### **The Common Third**

The concept of the 'Common Third' is central to social pedagogic practice. Essentially the Common Third is about using an activity to strengthen the bond between social pedagogue and child and to develop new skills. This could be any activity, be it cooking pancakes, tying shoelaces,

fixing a bike, building a kite, playing football together, going on a fishing trip together. Any of these activities can be so much more than merely doing something – it is about creating a commonly shared situation that becomes a symbol of the relationship between the social pedagogue and the child, something 'third' that brings the two together: they are sharing an activity, and to be sharing something, to have something in common, implies in principle to be equal, to be two (or more) individuals on equal terms, with equal rights and dignity.

The Common Third also means that the social pedagogue is authentic and self-reflective, bringing in their own personality as an important resource. It is about finding an activity in which the social pedagogue and the child are both genuinely interested. In this sense, the Common Third suggests a child-centred approach and full participation of the child in every step – the child has to be involved on equal terms in all project phases, from the beginning to the end.

What makes the Common Third an especially attractive approach is that it embodies an understanding of holistic education that also includes the social pedagogue themselves. An equal relationship means that both share also a common potential of learning, on a basis of activity and action.

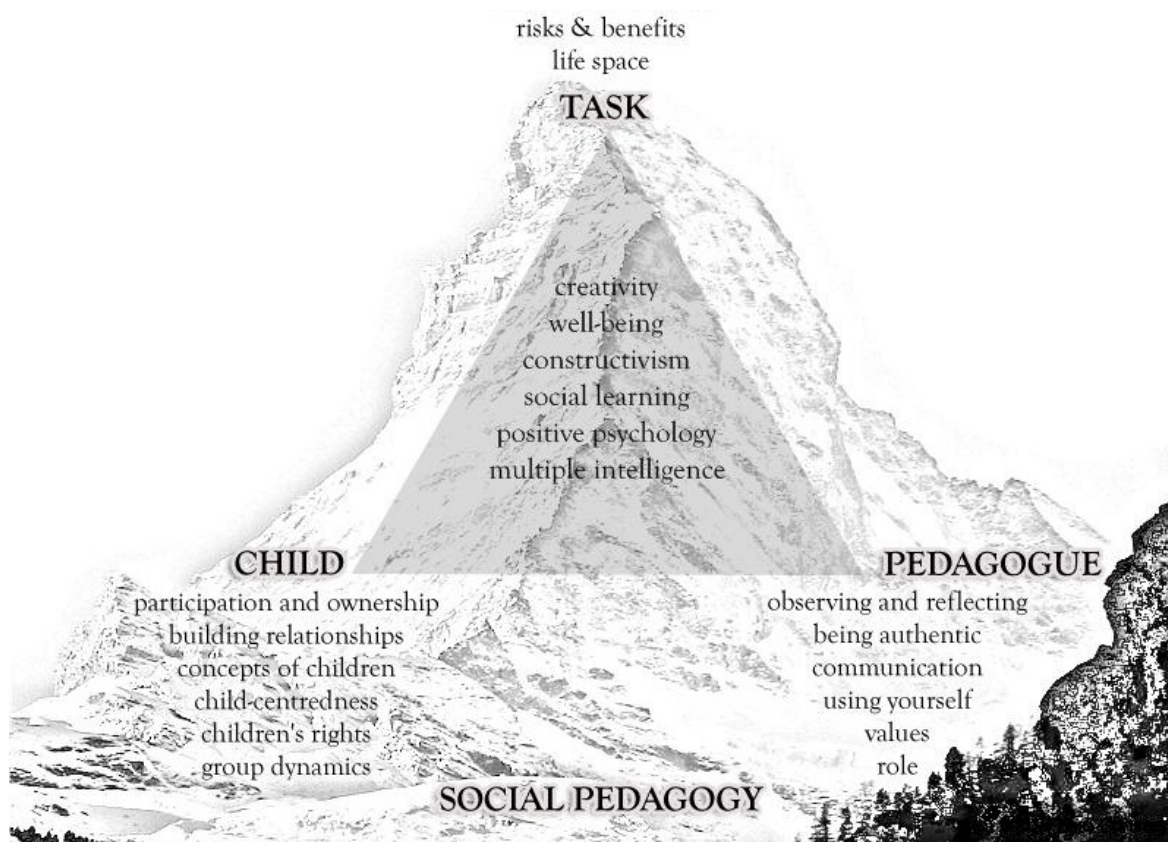
*Gabriel Eichsteller (ThemPra)*

## 4. Overview of the Sycamore Services social pedagogy training programme

The training programme consisted of 3 x 3-days blocks of training delivered at their training centre in Kirkcaldy. A follow-up day to review learning was held on 5th June, approximately 6 months after completion of the training. The training programme had been preceded by 4 x half-day sessions to introduce the concept of social pedagogy to a large portion of Sycamore staff.

### *Training programme content*

An outline of the programme is provided in Appendix 1. The diagram below gives a broad overview of the curriculum of the training programme:



### *Training programme dates*

Introducing Social Pedagogy	29, 30 September 2008
First phase of training: social pedagogy and the pedagogue	22, 23, 24, October 2008
Second phase: the child / young person	17, 18, 19 November 2008
Third phase: task and activities	15, 16, 17 December 2008

A total of 16 members of staff took part in the 9-day training programme:

Staff roles	Numbers
Foster-carers	2
Residential managers & workers	9 (of whom 2 were at unit manager level or above, and one was a domestic)
Education staff	2 (one senior teacher, and one classroom assistant)
Family support manager & worker	2 (based in the Family Centre)
Throughcare worker	1

### Organisational preparation for the programme

This programme was established as a pilot programme with one group of staff who would be drawn from all the service units. In order to support the training it was agreed that a half-day Introduction to Social pedagogy course would be provided by the trainers. Given that the concept of 'social pedagogy' was not well understood across the staff team it was felt that it was important that a larger proportion of the total staff group should have some information about the concept so they might be better aware of what their colleagues were being trained in.

These four half day sessions were attended by a total of 45 out of a staff group of about 90.

These sessions were evaluated using a standard form developed by the trainers. A total of 37 evaluation forms were returned and the following responses collated:

#### *Gain in knowledge*

- The participants were asked to rate their knowledge of social pedagogy before and after the training session; using a 5-point scale from 1=poor to 5=excellent.

All respondents to 'before' scored themselves 1-3 (11, 11 and 13 respectively)

While 'after' responses had moved up, and all except one responded 3-5 (5, 21, 10 respectively)

#### *Usefulness of the subject matter*

- Participants were asked how useful the content was, using a 5-point scale from 1=not at all useful to 5=very useful.

21 gave this a 5 and 16 a 4, indicating a very high level of perceived usefulness

- Participants were also asked to give an overall rating from on a 10-point scale from 1=very poor to 10=excellent.

Again the great majority of participants gave scores in the range 8-10.

## 5. The scope of the evaluation

The data for the evaluation report came from a number of sources. On the last day of the training programme all the participants were issued with the questionnaires. All the participants were also invited to take part in one of three group interviews. The group interviews took place in the week following the delivery of each phase of the training programme. 13 of the 16 participants took part in one of the group interviews and 15 participants completed and returned questionnaires. The researcher also carried out interviews with the Head of Service (Tim Foley) and the Learning and Development Business Partner (Moira Greentree) and conducted further telephone and e-mail interviews with the trainers (Sylvia Holthoff and Gabriel Eichsteller). The researcher also had access to the results of the baseline questionnaires which had been issued by the trainers following the delivery of 4 half-day 'Introduction to social pedagogy' sessions which were offered to a large number of Sycamore staff as part of the introduction of the training.

### *The aim of the evaluation*

The managers of the Sycamore project described what they hoped the outcomes would be from their introduction to social pedagogy:

*'The opportunity to pilot social pedagogy provides the opportunity to fill gaps in existing provision, to re-align Sycamore's philosophy and practice with an approach that is known to add significant benefits to children and young people who live in residential services. Sycamore is confident that operating from a social pedagogy perspective will bring significant benefits to those individuals working with children and young people in their efforts to meet the needs of some of Scotland's most severely disadvantaged children and young people' (Social pedagogy training programme planning document, 2008)*

The aim of the evaluation was to find out how relevant the participants felt it had been to their work, and what impact it had on their practice. The evaluation sought out specific pieces of learning or specific examples of its impact on practice rather than merely asking in general terms whether participants found it useful or not. The group interviews also explored similar issues. The questionnaires listed a number of central elements of social pedagogy (Petrie et al. 2009) and for each one asked participants to what extent the element had featured during the course and how relevant they found it for their job. The evaluation also sought to explore in what ways a social pedagogic approach might differ from the mainstream UK social care and social work training. The questionnaire thus had a supplementary section for those who had completed courses in either HNC in Social Care or BA in Social Work. The numbers involved under this category are small therefore any findings must be treated with caution in terms of generalisability.



## 6. Findings

The following findings are derived from the questionnaires and the three group interviews. In seeking to evaluate the perceived usefulness, relevance and impact of the training the following themes emerged:

### 6.1 Context

It should be noted at this point that the participants were a 'mixed bunch' in terms of their prior levels of experience, training and seniority, ranging from senior and experienced managers who had BA/DipSW qualifications to a member of domestic staff and a new foster-carer with no professional qualifications. The more highly trained and experienced staff provided fuller and more analytical responses. There was, however, a great deal of commonality among the responses and the following findings were echoed widely across the group. This comment gives a flavour of the experience which seemed widely shared:

*'there was a lot of self discovery and a lot having to think on your feet and a lot of reassessing and re-evaluating things all the time' (Throughcare worker)*

### 6.2 Overall ratings

#### 6.2.1 Overall value

The questionnaires asked respondents to give an overall rating of the 'usefulness and relevance' of the training course, based on a 5-point scale from 'very useful, highly relevant' to 'not at all useful to me'.

All 15 respondents gave it the highest possible score.

The **overall value** was also explored in a question which asked: *Should this training be rolled out to all staff?*

This was a 'tick-box' question which asked if all Sycamore services staff should receive this training – the questionnaire noted that this would be a big commitment of money and time. Respondents were given a 4-point scale ranging from the highest 'yes, definitely' to the lowest 'no, not worth cost in time and money'

All 15 respondents ticked the highest category.

#### 6.2.2 The social pedagogy curriculum

Participants were asked questions about the content of the course and its perceived relevance to the participants' job role. The question listed six core aspects of social pedagogy (adapted from Petrie et al, 2009):

1. Importance of the worker's personal relationship with the child, and the potential of that relationship to help the young person;
2. Reflective practice; understanding self and linking theory to practice;
3. Group care skills and a positive attitude to working with group of young people;
4. Teamwork and working positively with other staff in the team;
5. Learning practical skills;
6. Integrating a 'children's rights' understanding into practice.

For each aspect respondents were asked two questions:

- a) To what extent this aspect had actually featured in the course

They were given a 3-point scale to choose from which included 'featured a lot', 'featured a bit' and 'did not feature at all'

- b) 'How useful it was'

They were given a 4-point scale to choose from ranging from 'I found it very helpful for my job' to 'I didn't find it at all relevant for my job'

These questions also elicited very high scores. Thirteen respondents entered the highest category for both questions on all six aspects (i.e. it 'featured a lot during the course' and 'I found it very relevant for my job'). The two exceptions only varied the scoring slightly: one foster carer said in respect of two questions that dealt with the aspects 'working in groups' and 'teamwork;' that they did 'feature a lot' but this was not relevant for their job. The only other variation was a slight one; one person said of the two questions related to the aspects 'working with groups' and 'teamwork' that they found it 'quite useful' rather than 'very helpful' as the 13 other respondents had done.

These findings add up to a strong confirmation of the relevance and usefulness of the course as seen by the respondents.

### 6.3 New learning (knowledge and skills)

#### 6.3.1 New learning

The questionnaire asked respondents to identify up to three topics or ideas that they felt were 'new to you'. This was an open-ended question. All respondents gave some ideas and most identified three. Only one respondent did not identify any specific areas. This was a recently-recruited foster-carer who stated that 'all topics were new'.

The most frequently listed topic was 'head, hands and heart', mentioned by six respondents, as typified by the following response:

*'Head, heart and hands approach/model to work more holistically with young people.'*

Three respondents mentioned reflective-ness/reflection. Three respondents also identified 'theory' which underpinned practice. Two respondents mentioned 'activities' or 'creative activities'. Finally, another two respondents mentioned participation which might be considered to be related topics.

A number of respondents said that the topics were not necessarily new to them but still identified some aspect which was new:

*'Most if not all of the concepts and ideas were familiar – however, I feel that many, especially communication/practical engagement and participation were reframed in a more meaningful way.'*

Another said:

*'I didn't feel much of the concepts were new however, the theory and underpinning was.'*

*'I think the best bit for me in the 3 days was the amount of reflection we did. Especially with the team games ..... The one for me was the culture shock one when we had to scream at someone'*



*when they didn't conform to our culture and it made me reflect on how children when they come into a residential services having maybe been in foster care, the shock it must have for them coming into a very regimented, boundaries, guidelines, I really enjoyed that bit and I took that back to work with me actually'*

### **6.3.2 Personal development**

The questionnaire also posed an open question which asked respondents to identify any specific or general benefits they had gained from the programme. This generated a wide range of responses, some comments related to the theory of social pedagogy,

*'The social pedagogy way of working is already very apparent throughout Sycamore. This course has been excellent in giving a framework and providing fresh ideas and experiences; 'challenge through choice\* (see page 19), and participation in learning.'*

*'Social pedagogy puts a framework to the work we undertake with the children.'*

*'The practical nature of the activities which helped to make social pedagogy more meaningful to me and my role.'*

others picked up specific aspects such as teamwork or the use of practical activities in work with young people,

*'The massive use of teamwork to develop both as a group and an individual.'*

*'Participation in activities that have meaning, can be related to work practice, remembered and not forgotten.'*

*'The real use of practical and varied tasks to look at subjects – which led to a real participation by all those who were involved.'*

while others reported benefits in terms of things they had learned about the learning process itself.

*'The use of different styles to allow all to learn and develop a better understanding and knowledge base.'*

A number of respondents felt that they had not just learned about young people but had been made to think more from a young person's perspective.

*'Being put in situations out of my comfort zone – how the young people feel!'*

*'That everything is possible; that I need more time to attend to the 'fun' part of the job.'*

## 6.4 Impact on practice

The questionnaire and the group interviews asked participants for examples of how their practice had been impacted or changed as a result of the programme. Once again most of the respondents were able to identify areas of work where they were now thinking or acting in new ways.

### **Activities**

Making more use of the outdoors had been picked up by one of the residential workers. He explained that the course had made him think more about using the fields and woods near the house where he worked. He recalled one week-end when he had encouraged a group of the young people to go and build a 'den' in woods nearby. He accompanied them for part of the time and noted that:

*'The kids got right into it – they really enjoyed building the den and wanted to go back there the next day too. Even the boys who tended to fight with each other were getting on really well making the den.'*

Other comments included:

*'invigorating ideas to have more fun with the young people and to attend to young people rights'*

*'highlights opportunities for engagement, 'common third'*

*'This training will enhance my practice by allowing young people the space and time to discover new concepts, experiences, promoting wellbeing, joy and using rhythms and routines in a more creative manner.'*

### **Communication**

There were several staff who commented on issues around communication; both with young people and colleagues:

*'felt the reflection and observation, taking time to stand back instead of rushing in.'*

*'Communication – not to take it for granted that what I am saying is the same perspective as the other person'*

*'Taking more care over communication with children'*

*'It has also opened up my thinking to other peoples learning styles, zones, self-concepts, teambuilding and offering challenge through choice!\*(see below, p.19 for explanation of the concept 'challenge by choice')*

*'team meetings, supervising staff'*

### **Reflection**

It was clear that the idea and practice of 'reflection' was one that had really stuck with quite a number

of participants; and their comments seemed to include both the increased capacity to reflect on themselves and how they interacted with children and colleagues, but also made them think more 'reflectively' about the young person's experience:

*'I have found my practice to have benefitted from more reflection. I have also used my new knowledge to try and educate other staff members about child centred/holistic practice.'*

*'Reflection on 'why' in general'*

*'Social pedagogy has made me more reflective in my approach in dealing with situations.'*

*'This has changed me as a person, when I first became a foster parent I thought I was helping the child my way. Now that that I have attended the course it has completely change how I use my 'parenting skills''*

*'I see an impact of both the staff team because Alan & I when we are on shift together [shortly after the course] when we are called into a different Unit. There's quite few new staff on we both kind of stood back and watched what has been happening then Alan picked out a strength from each team member and fed them a bit more "do you think it would be good to do this" and let them do it, cause usually we'd have just went in took over the shift and sorted the kids out.'*

## 6.5 Supplementary question on comparisons with formal social work/care training

The questionnaire contained an additional short set of questions aimed at those who had undertaken either professional social work training, or the HNC in Social Care. These were very broad questions and perhaps did not allow for full exploration of the issues of comparing an in-service type training programme with full-time professional courses. It was felt, however, that it would be of value to begin to explore comparisons, given current policy and professional interest in comparing the different systems of professional training in this area.

From the group of 16 participants, four had the BA in Social Work (or equivalent), one had the HNC. A further one person was currently undertaking the BA in Social Work and another one person was undertaking the HNC. Six questionnaires were returned which contained answers to this part of the questionnaire. The small number of returns means that care should be taken in generalising from these answers.

Participants were asked to compare the two approaches: social work/care and social pedagogy, and to highlight strengths for each. Not all respondents answered each section.

One respondent made the point that a 9-day introductory course cannot really be compared to one-year HNC course or three or four-year course leading to the BA in Social Work. Another did not say how they contrasted but thought that the emphases in each were complementary.

When asked how social pedagogy differed from social work, answers included; that social pedagogy seemed to have a better integration of theory and practice, had more of a focus on teamwork, and emphasised children's rights more. Social work was seen as having a solid theory base and with a strong focus on policies and procedures. Others noted that social work did not provide as much of a focus on 'lifespace' as did social pedagogy and that social pedagogy allows more risk-taking. Social

pedagogy was also seen to promote a more practical , 'hands-on' approach which included creative activities, one respondent noting that it 'focussed creativity on proper goals and purposes.'

**\*Challenge by choice training strategy:**

*Challenge by choice has in the recent years become a key expression related to activities in the area of experiential learning. Yet, experience has shown that it can also promote a positive learning climate in other learning situations. Challenge by choice is meant to encourage the learner to decide for themselves if, what, when and how they can and want to learn. The learner is invited and encouraged to engage in a learning situation, but not forced to do so. It is her or his personal right to skip an activity and to get the acceptance of the group in doing so. The challenge by choice approach is strongly related to the Learning zone model.*

*This means that only the learner her- or himself can judge if the task is actually a challenge and draws them out of the comfort into the learning zone. Or if it arouses so much anxiety that learning cannot proceed and that her/him are on the edge of the panic zone and need step out of this situation. When a learner intends to break off participating in a task s/he are encouraged to reflect what made her/him step out and what changes in the learning setting could be useful to enable them to engage again. In such situations other members of the group can also support the process and can promote the awareness of reflecting the personal situation in context with the group's aims and ambitions.*

The approach aims to encourage the participant to develop more ownership of their personal learning and development, by reducing the external pressure and expectations and by giving the learner the responsibility for the learning process.

*Sylvia Holthoff - Thempra*

## 7. Conclusions

### General

There is no doubt that the programme has been very highly rated by the participants, who consist of a cross-section of Sycamore Services staff with varied levels of qualifications and experience. The most detailed feedback has come from the most senior, and highly trained, staff. It is striking that staff with diverse levels of previous training, and length of experience, appeared to be equally positive about what they had gained personally from the course. All of the participants reported enjoying the programme a great deal, even though at the outset they felt that some of the tasks and the training methods would be challenging in a number of ways.

### Key aspects

#### 1. Relevance and usefulness

The training course was seen by participants as challenging and enjoyable, but also very stimulating and relevant for their job.

- Relevance – the participants were frequently able to identify specific learning they had applied in practice;
- The course seemed to fit well with the existing care philosophy, 'the Sycamore way';
- A number of participants felt that it had provided them with access to theory that supported or underpinned work they were already doing;
- Many of the participants said they wanted all the staff in their team to undertake this training so that everyone would have a shared understanding.

#### 2. Training process and methods

Undoubtedly the process and methods of the training, which included the modelling of a social pedagogy approach, played a significant role in the training experience. The trainers made regular use of groups and placed responsibility for learning back onto the participants through the 'challenge through choice' technique. The trainers used a range of active learning methods including experiential learning, team games and problem-solving activities. In particular, the following emerged:

- Many of the participants noted how challenging the course had seemed at the outset, and some of the activities they were invited to undertake.
- The meeting of these challenges had undoubtedly created a very positive sense of achievement, and also of what was possible in their work – one participant said one of the things they had learned was that, 'everything is possible'.

#### 3. Reflective practice and specific aspects of learning

Several of the participants also reported learning more about being reflective in their practice. This involved being more 'reflective' in daily practice situations, but also being able to draw on theory when facing practice situations. Particular points worth emphasising are as follows:

- A number of participants said they valued the 'theory' they had learned during the course and that this helped them to make sense of both the overall Sycamore approach and their own work practice. This was a notable finding because there were no questions which asked about 'theory' as such.
- Gaining a better understanding of communication in the context of building relationships with children and young people was a prominent theme in a number of responses.

## Summary

This training programme has introduced participants to social pedagogy and helped them make use of elements of its theory base, insights and strategies to strengthen their child care practices.

This training programme is perceived by the participants to be congruent with existing Sycamore practice and philosophy.

This training programme has developed the reflective capacity of the participants; it has enabled them to think about different ways of working with young people and of drawing on theories to inform their work.

Participants offered many examples of how the training had given them insights into the child's experience and tools and techniques to work with different kinds of problem behaviour. It had encouraged them to integrate a 'children's rights' perspective into their work in a stronger way.

The skills and methods of the trainers have been very effective in challenging, educating and developing a diverse group of staff – it developed teamwork in action.

## Final words

The following quotes come from several participants in their response to a question about the 'current impact' of the training on their practice and are representative of the group as a whole:

*'invigorating ideas to have more fun with the young people and to attend to young people's rights'*  
**(Residential worker)**

*'Reflection on 'why' in general'* **(Residential worker)**

*'felt the reflection and observation, taking time to stand back instead of rushing in.'* **(Education support worker)**

*'Communication – not to take it for granted that what I am saying is the same perspective as the other person'* **(Family support worker)**

*'Social pedagogy has made me more reflective in my approach in dealing with situations.'*  
**(Residential worker)**

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## Appendix 1 – Outline of the training programme

### ThemPra Social Pedagogy – Personal and Professional Development Course

#### **Day 1:**

Welcome and creative introductory activities to get to know participants at a professional and personal level (this was repeated daily as part of a welcome ritual) and for participants to get to know each other.

Outline of course programme and ThemPra's learning methods, which are based on dialogue and jointly constructing a Sycamore social pedagogic approach, and the notion that it is not possible to teach, but it is possible to create situations wherein it is impossible not to learn

Introduction into social pedagogy: how social pedagogy has emerged in relationship with society and the welfare state; explorative activity to introduce participants to some of the key pedagogic thinkers who have shaped social pedagogy in various countries

Outdoor group challenges designed to establish a sense of group belonging in participants and to convey through reflection central social pedagogic themes in line with the Common Third and to support the transfer of theory into practice

Core theories relevant for social pedagogic learning and underpinning the aims of social pedagogy

Creative individualised reviewing of day's learning to enable participants to make personal links between the course and their practice, followed by feedback reflection on the day (this was done every day using varying methods)

#### **Day 2:**

Theories on 3Ps, using personality and pedagogic styles, explored and discussed interactively

Case studies describing residential child care in German and Danish children's homes led to discussions about pedagogic care practice and the relevance of the care system for social pedagogy

Communication activities highlighting key aspects of the nature of both verbal and non-verbal communication and providing opportunities to experience the practical implications of communication theory

Discussions on the relation between "using yourself" and communication and how relationships can be positively influenced by different communication methods.

#### **Day 3:**

Personal and professional values – how they underpin the home's culture and our practice – illustrated through the 'Dederdians', an activity depicting intercultural differences in value systems and its impact

Experiential learning group challenges designed to support cohesive group development, reflect on central elements of social pedagogy and provide participants with practical activities that can be undertaken with their young people

#### **Day 4:**

Recap on social pedagogy to refresh participants' understanding of social pedagogy

Sensual journey to experience how holistic sensory perception enriches the inner world and how sensory perception is linked to experience and interpretations of experiences

Development of self structure and self concept and what they mean for working with children in care

Exploring interdisciplinary theories and children's stories around supporting well-being and resilience by building on positive experiences that demonstrate children's richness

Practical ways of facilitating well-being

#### **Day 5:**

Exploring relationships and what is important for children in their relationships with care workers, based on participants' findings from asking the children in their care homes

Group dynamics and how to constructively work with groups in different phases, discussed both in

theoretic terms and after practical team building activities

Participation and empowerment – the importance of involving children in decision-making for working in a social pedagogic way

Children's rights quiz on the core elements of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and active discussions of how to adopt a rights-based working approach

The 'rich child' and how to build on concepts of children's competence and active agency – exploration of how these notions conflict with a pathologizing professional framework and socially constructed stereotypes, and what participants can contribute to promoting more positive concepts of children

#### **Day 6:**

Outdoor-based experiential learning activities to develop trust, strengthen sensual perceptions and experience of belonging within group

Multiple Intelligences as a theory framework emphasizing the inherent value of every person, perceiving them as competent, intelligent learners in their different ways – discussion on what this means for working with children, but also with others (team colleagues, parents, etc.)

Risk and benefits show to controversially discuss the benefits of risk-taking versus the health and safety concerns stifling experiential learning and the development of risk competence

#### **Day 7:**

The assumptions game providing participants with a playful introduction into the pitfalls of drawing conclusions based on subjective interpretations

Observations – Interpretations: a classroom-scene role-play signifying the importance of keeping observations and interpretations separate

From needs to rights: group activity and joint dialogue about how a right-based approach in social pedagogy can move practice beyond a needs-based deficit model

Musical clay activity illustrating the power of atmosphere and rhythm on our feelings and creativity

Creativity in theory and its implications for well-being and practice

#### **Day 8:**

The Common Third of using joint interests in order to develop and strengthen relationships with children in a way that sees professionals and children share the life space as equal human beings

Social pedagogy recap of key words from the course and learning transfer to make participants reflect on how they can embrace social pedagogy in their practice

Presentations of working groups portraying what social pedagogy means with regards to their practice and what other changes in the organisation and the wider culture would support social pedagogy more

#### **Day 9:**

Joint cooking as a way of bringing the Common Third to life and ensuring strong intra-group relationships, which will make social pedagogy more sustainable within this group

Discussion on academic accreditation opportunity for the course and details considering the course assignments

Celebrations and farewell

## Introducing social pedagogy to residential child care in Scotland

Evaluation of a social pedagogy training programme for a multi-disciplinary group of staff.

### Participant Questionnaire

This questionnaire has been designed to gather the opinions and experiences of the Sycamore staff who have participated in the 9-day training programme run between October – December 2008.

Response number (leave blank):

#### *Preliminary*

This questionnaire is intended to be anonymous, but it would be helpful if you could indicate what your job role is.

#### **Respondent information: job type.**

Please tick one of the following:

Foster-carer	
Residential worker	
Education staff	
Family support worker	
Throughcare support worker	

#### **1. Please give an overall rating for how useful and relevant this course has been for your work:**

(Tick one)

Very useful, highly relevant	
Quite useful, fairly relevant	
Okay but not that useful	
Very little use to me	
Not at all useful	

**2. In terms of the content of the course, please list 3 topics or ideas that you felt were new to you:**

- 1.....
- 2.....
- 3.....

**3. Please describe one or two things that you personally felt you have really benefitted from, from the course; this could be something very specific or something more general:**

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**4. The following areas are considered to be key features of social pedagogy generally. Please say to what extent each of them has been covered in this course and how useful this has been.**

*1. The importance of the worker's **personal relationship** with the child/ young person, and the potential of the relationship to help the child/young person*

a) Please tick one

Featured a lot during the course	
Feature a bit during the course	
Not really part of the course at all	

b) How useful did you find this topic  
Please tick one

I found it very helpful for my job	
I found it quite useful for my job	
I found it only slightly useful for my job	
I didn't find it at all relevant for my job	

2. Ideas about '**reflective practice**'; understanding self and linking theory to practice

a) Please tick one

Featured a lot during the course	
Featured a bit during the course	
Not really part of the course at all	

b) How useful did you find this topic

Please tick one

I found it very helpful for my job	
I found it quite useful for my job	
I found it only slightly useful for my job	
I didn't find it at all relevant for my job	

3. Group care skills: having a positive attitude to working with **groups** of young people

a) Please tick one

Featured a lot during the course	
Featured a bit during the course	
Not really part of the course at all	

b) How useful did you find this topic

Please tick one

I found it very helpful for my job	
I found it quite useful for my job	
I found it only slightly useful for my job	
I didn't find it at all relevant for my job	

4. Improving **team-work**; working collaboratively with other staff in your unit/project

a) Please tick one

Featured a lot during the course	
Featured a bit during the course	
Not really part of the course at all	

b) How useful did you find this topic

Please tick one

I found it very helpful for my job	
I found it quite useful for my job	
I found it only slightly useful for my job	
I didn't find it at all relevant for my job	

5. learning **practical skills** in working with children/young people

a) Please tick one

Featured a lot during the course	
Featured a bit during the course	
Not really part of the course at all	

b) How useful did you find this topic

Please tick one

I found it very helpful for my job	
I found it quite useful for my job	
I found it only slightly useful for my job	
I didn't find it at all relevant for my job	

6. Children’s rights; integrating a **children’s rights understanding** into my work

a) Please tick one

Featured a lot during the course	
Featured a bit during the course	
Not really part of the course at all	

b) How useful did you find this topic  
Please tick one

I found it very helpful for my job	
I found it quite useful for my job	
I found it only slightly useful for my job	
I didn’t find it at all relevant for my job	

**5. Impact on overall practice in your unit/project**  
**Please describe either:**

a) any ways in which this training has affected practice in the unit/project you work in:

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b) any ways in which you think that social pedagogy could have an impact in the future:

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**6. Would you recommend that all social work and social care staff at Sycamore should receive this training? This would involve a big investment of time and money.**

Please tick one

Yes, definitely	
Yes, probably	
Not sure	
No, not worth the cost in time and money	

*Thanks for taking the time to complete this questionnaire. It will help provide essential information for the evaluation of the programme.*



## Introducing social pedagogy to residential child care in Scotland

Evaluation of a social pedagogy training programme for a multi-disciplinary group of staff.

### Participant Questionnaire

This questionnaire has been designed to gather the opinions and experiences of the Sycamore staff who have participated in the 9-day training programme run between October – December 2008.

#### Questions for those who have done social work qualifying training:

**1. Which social work / social care course did you do:**

Please tick one:

**BA in Social Work (or DipSW)**

- RGU SIRCC pathway
- RGU general pathway
- Other University

**HNC in Social Care**

- SIRCC HNC
- Other HNC

**2. What reflections do you have looking back at your Social Work course now that you have done this social pedagogy training?**

a) In your opinion are there any noticeable differences between social work and social pedagogy training?

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b) In your opinion what are its strengths compared to social work for the work you do?

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c) What are the strengths of social work / social care compared to social pedagogy for the job that you do?

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d) Are there some weaknesses in a social pedagogy approach from what you have learned so far?

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