

## Guest Editorial

Increasing interest in social pedagogy throughout Scotland appears to be reflected, strategically, through the emergence of training by organisations such as ThemPra, the evaluation of training programmes (Milligan 2009, and see Evelyn Vrouwenfelder's article in this issue), through bi-annual meetings of stakeholders and practitioners via the social pedagogy Development Network, through study visits by agency staff to European projects (ThemPra Mobility Project 2012) and by the increasing number of related articles and books being published.

From a practice perspective Chris Walter's article in this issue highlights a strong historical relationship between Camphill Communities and a pedagogic approach. It is, however, perhaps only over recent years that we have seen a change in ethos and the further development of a shared language of practice in residential child care that relates to social pedagogy. Increased agreement around terminology has, perhaps, also been reflected through transitions from a BA Curative Education to the BA (Hons) Social Pedagogy (Camphill Communities in partnership with Aberdeen University) and the change in exit award, to reflect course content more appropriately, to a BA Social Pedagogy through the BA (Hons) Social Work (Residential Child Care) by distance learning funded by Scottish Government through CELCIS and delivered by Robert Gordon University. Discussions around the development of a new qualifying course between Camphill Communities and RGU should, hopefully, yield more exciting developments in the study and practice of social pedagogy over the coming years.

It has been my experience over the past five years that there has been a clear shift in the understanding of residential child care workers in terms of what social pedagogy is and in what way pedagogic practice can contribute to the lives of the children and young people with whom they work. What is more, connections between past and current practice and social pedagogical approaches are being made. Jacob Kornbeck's article in this issue provides more detail about social pedagogic themes and practice but, in brief, social pedagogy with its roots in German progressive education is more commonly used to describe work which combines elements of education, social care and social work. Residential child care workers will already have a focus on building relationships to strengthen the bond between themselves and the young people and children with whom they work in order to support personal expression and the development of new skills and this is clearly social pedagogy in action. Practising in a way where worker and child inhabit the shared life space with the adult taking a critical and reflective approach to practice where support is offered for emotional, psychological, physical, spiritual and sexual development will be familiar to most. Pedagogical practice is value based with a clear emphasis on children's rights. Key to the ethos of social pedagogy is a strong emphasis on working with families, developing and sustaining authentic and mutual relationships to work purposefully and therapeutically with the child, carer and community.

Managing relationship and risk is also core to social pedagogy and will always present the worker with a challenge. If the young person is exposed to too little risk they might be

rendered unable to develop the skills to reach their full potential but also to protect themselves in later life. There is also an associated danger of their environment becoming sterile, offering few opportunities for experimentation, to be challenged, and for finding fulfilment and joy through the experience of success. Too much risk and the child could be made to feel fearful, unloved, neglected and abandoned, often repeating the previous poor experiences of early life. Where social pedagogy is practised risk is often 'managed' through practical activity that can be utilised to develop and maintain work with children and their carers. In essence, what we are focussing on here is upbringing, the focus of Mark Smith's article in this issue.

The views of young people on social pedagogy in practice are highlighted in the findings of a small scale research project conducted on a field trip in Denmark and represented in the Candles and Care article in this issue.

Social pedagogy in Scotland is developing in a way that is unique to its own political, cultural and social context. Continuing to pursue social pedagogy as an ethos that underpins practice in Scotland's residential child care services will require a change to some of the policies and procedures that support the workforce. We will need to become less risk adverse and more flexible in our responses to children, carers and the community. Importantly we will need to become even more comfortable with the notion of forming close, dependable relationships with children and young people in our care.

We hope that you enjoy this special issue of the SIRCC Journal.

Janine Bolger  
Guest Editor

## References

Milligan, I. (2009). *Introducing social pedagogy into Scottish residential child care: An evaluation of the Sycamore Services social pedagogy training programme*. Glasgow: Scottish Institute for Residential Child Care (SIRCC).

Thempra (2012). *Exploring social pedagogy in Danish practice: An EU Leonardo mobility project*. Retrieved from <http://social-pedagogy.co.uk/mobility.htm>