

Theory *meets* Practice

**ThemPra Social Pedagogy C.I.C.**

**ANNUAL REPORT  
ON THEMPRA'S  
COMMUNITY INTEREST 09/10**

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**ThemPra Social Pedagogy Community Interest Company**



## 1. WHO WE ARE

ThemPra Social Pedagogy C.I.C. is a community interest company with an ambitious vision: we believe that children and young people deserve the best and that a social pedagogic workforce can improve children and young people's life experiences through creative, holistic and child-centred services.

Behind ThemPra are the two directors Sylvia Holthoff and Gabriel Eichsteller, our company secretary Andy Carter, as well as our three associates Robyn Kemp, Lotte Harbo and Alexandra Priver. Back in 2007, Sylvia and Gabriel developed and facilitated the first social pedagogy seminars in the UK for the pilot project run by the National Centre for Excellence in Residential Child Care and funded by the Social Education Trust (SET). As part of that project Robyn introduced us to residential child care in the UK, and Lotte was one of the social pedagogues who contributed to the other part of the NCERCC pilot project. Through this project we also met Mike Tidball, former trustee of the SET, who helped us set up ThemPra and acted as third director and company secretary until his retirement in July 2010.

In order to drive social pedagogy forward and to expand from these experiences we have set up a social enterprise which symbolizes the synergy of social pedagogy in theory and practice: ThemPra. ThemPra stands for *TheorymeetsPractice*, which reflects our style of working and way of thinking. We have set ourselves the ambitious overarching aim to support the development and implementation of social pedagogy in the UK in various ways, some of which are outlined below.

## 2. INTRODUCTION

Set up in September 2008, ThemPra Social Pedagogy has now been existing for two years. Over the last year we have aimed to build on our work in year 1 by supporting the development of Social Pedagogy within the UK. This short report aims to give a brief outline of what we have achieved in our second year and how our work has benefitted the community of professionals and children in care we have set out to serve.

### **Community Interest Statement**

*ThemPra Social Pedagogy Community Interest Company provides benefits to various groups within the general community. Through its emphasis on Social Pedagogy ThemPra promotes a positive approach to children and young people, particularly those looked after by local authorities.*

*There is overwhelming evidence that children and young people benefit in their personal and social development where professionals are trained Social Pedagogues (see research by Thomas Coram Research Unit, University of London – Petrie et. al, 2006). This is especially relevant for those children and young people who are disadvantaged as they can be helped to achieve better outcomes and improve their life experiences through a social pedagogic approach (cf. conference by the international child care organisation FICE International and National Children’s Bureau, 18/01/2008).*

*The pilot training in Social Pedagogy, which we designed and delivered for the National Centre for Excellence in Residential Child Care in 2007 (see National Centre for Excellence in Residential Child Care/Social Education Trust report: Introducing Social Pedagogy into Residential Child Care in England, 2008), clearly demonstrates the manifold immediate and long term benefits that Social Pedagogy offers to children in public care.*

*The issues were discussed in a workshop in Ghent, Belgium in October 2007 involving several local authorities and voluntary agencies in the UK with social pedagogues from a number of European countries. The impact of this work on practice and thinking in individual children’s homes managed by these agencies is now being independently evaluated by Dave Crimmens, Reader in Children’s Social Care and Education at the University of Lincoln.*

*ThemPra will offer a variety of services, described below, which will complement the interest in social pedagogy of the Department of Children Schools and Families and also the academic work of the Thomas Coram Research Unit at the Institute of Education, University of London.*

*Our focus will be to provide a service to local authorities, voluntary and private agencies, based on the assessment of their needs, to improve the quality and focus of their work practice, within a businesslike framework agreed between ThemPra and its clients. This has already generated very positive support from a number of local authorities and other agencies in the UK, with whom we have already worked, and we have received a number of enquires expressing interest for the future.*

*While we ultimately aim to contribute to improving the lives of children and young people, we are aware that this requires raising the quality of the children’s and young people’s workforce. Therefore ThemPra will predominantly educate and train professionals in Social Pedagogy.*

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### 3. ACTIVITIES IN 2009/2010

From the outset, ThemPra defined its activities in four different strands and envisioned the benefit to the community as follows:

Activity	Benefit to the community
<p><b>Activity Strand I:</b> Providing personal and professional development courses and consultancy to children's and young people's workforce</p>	<p>Thoroughly trained professionals who are capable of using core pedagogic principles in their practice, thereby improving children's and young people's overall well-being and personal and social development. It must also be noted that this serves to improve professionals' self-confidence, knowledge, abilities and skills.</p>
<p><b>Activity Strand II:</b> Promoting Social Pedagogy through workshops, conferences, public speaking, publications, partnership working and networking with similar-minded or interested organisations</p>	<p>Professionals are offered opportunities to consider how they can adopt a social pedagogic approach.</p> <p>These activities are also suitable to drive the implementation of Social Pedagogy forward on a national level, raising awareness for the benefits of using Social Pedagogy and how this will reflect on the Government's strategy and outcomes for children and young people's in "Every Child Matters".</p>
<p><b>Activity Strand III:</b> Conducting research in adaptability and advantages of working with a social pedagogic approach</p>	<p>Since Social Pedagogy is still a very new approach in the U.K., though not in other European countries where it has been established for many years, much will have to be done in order to convince the children's workforce and their managers of the benefits.</p> <p>By conducting academic research and ensuring scientific evaluation of ThemPra's work, we aim to provide evidence as well as find out what approach in adopting Social Pedagogy is most viable.</p> <p>This will help other professionals to consider different options as to how they can make best use of Social Pedagogy within their work context. Our work will also complement the work of other academics in the U.K.</p>
<p><b>Activity Strand IV:</b> Developing accredited qualifications enabling practitioners to train in social pedagogic approaches to care and education</p>	<p>As most practitioners are qualified at NVQ level, we aim to provide opportunities for them to gain an accredited qualification in social pedagogic approaches for care and education.</p> <p>We hope this will have the double effect of qualifying the workforce better using present and familiar structures and will possibly encourage some practitioners to pursue an academic qualification during their career.</p> <p>The aim of up-skilling the children's and young people's workforce is very much in line with Government initiatives and the work of the Children's Workforce Development Council.</p>

Here is a list of the activities we have undertaken in each of these strands to benefit the community of children in public care and the professionals who look after them in children's residential homes:

### **3.1 ACTIVITY STRAND I:**

Over the last 12 months we have run a total of 7 social pedagogy courses with 4 organisations: Essex County Council's Residential and Fostering Services, Sycamore Service in Kirkcaldy, Staffordshire County Council's Residential Service, and the Scottish Institute for Residential Child Care. Participants in these courses came from at least 20 different children's homes as well as several foster families and have since been active in implementing social pedagogy across their work place.

Now heading into its third and final year, the project in Essex County Council is being independently evaluated by Dave Crimmens from the University of Lincoln and has already led to many positive achievements. A brief article by the internal researcher for Essex, Nicola Boyce, suggests that the most central developments around social pedagogy so far have been about re-thinking the role of the practitioner as an authentic professional, introducing the notion of 'risk competence' which has led to a less risk-averse approach, and building stronger, more positive relationships with the children in their care.<sup>1</sup> We have also put together a collection of essays from practitioners who describe how social pedagogy has influenced their practice.<sup>2</sup>

We also began working with Essex's Fostering Service, training 11 fostering social workers and 5 foster carers together. Course participants felt that social pedagogy provides them with a conceptual framework that both parties can easily relate to and identify with. And the shared experience of learning together, engaging in open dialogue and overcoming some challenging group tasks served to bring the carers and their supervising social workers more closely together. Subject to further funding, we hope that this type of work will be continued in 2011.

Our 9-day course with Sycamore built on the work we were doing there the year before and served to further the enthusiasm for social pedagogy within Sycamore. Two of the practitioners who had been on the course gave a presentation at an information day at SIRCC about how they had used social pedagogy to enhance their practice.

Staffordshire County Council are now also working together with us on a three-year implementation strategy, and the work began in spring 2010 with one home that has been part of the Department for Education's national pilot project. Employing two

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<sup>1</sup> Boyce, N. (2010). Social Pedagogy in Essex. *ChildrenWebmag*. Available for download online: <http://www.childrenwebmag.com/articles/social-pedagogy/social-pedagogy-in-essex> (last access on 07/10/10)

<sup>2</sup> Available for download online: <http://socialpedagogy.co.uk/downloads/Social%20Pedagogy%20from%20the%20Perspectives%20of%20Practitioners.pdf> (last access on 07/10/10)

social pedagogues, the home greatly benefitted from the 9-day team course and their joint learning journey and have very much embraced social pedagogy, seeing their pedagogues as a resource.

Another important training course was commissioned by the Scottish Institute for Residential Child Care who asked us to train 16 participants from 4 different residential providers in Scotland. The 9-day course started in September and is currently being evaluated by Ian Milligan from SIRCC. Initial feedback from the participants was overwhelmingly positive, and the group has been very active in sharing their learning within their organisations and, where possible, beyond.

We have found it again very inspirational to work together with so many committed and passionate professionals who can recognise and realise the potential of social pedagogy, and seeing the successes they've achieved and challenges they've overcome as part of their social pedagogy journey reassures us that our work has a positive impact on both professionals and the children they work with.

### **3.2 ACTIVITY STRAND II:**

#### **Social Pedagogy Development Network**

In an effort to connect the many emerging 'shoots' of social pedagogic activity and nurture a pedagogic culture of collaboration, diversity and dialogue, ThemPra has set up the Social Pedagogy Development Network (SPDN). Organised in partnership with the *Thomas Coram Research Unit*, the *National Centre for Excellence in Residential Child Care*, *Jacaranda Recruitment*, and *FICE-England*, and facilitated by ThemPra, the SPDN held its first meeting in Colchester on November 27, 2010. For this start-off event, which was hosted by Essex County Council, we welcomed around 60 participants from 45 organisations, who had travelled from Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales, England as well as Belgium, Germany and Denmark to become part of this grassroots movement for social pedagogy. The second meeting was hosted by Staffordshire County Council on June 18, 2010, and attended by nearly 80 participants from many different organisations and several professions within the children's workforce. In the meantime the SPDN has become a biannual forum for people to share their experiences and ideas around social pedagogy and to jointly develop a UK tradition of social pedagogy based on the expertise and existing traditions that participants bring with them.

From the beginning we emphasised that the SPDN must be a free forum to attend based on the notion that everyone comes to contribute and everyone is important in this process. To finance the venue costs we have succeeded in finding a host organisation for each event, which provide a suitable venue and refreshments. As part of our community interest activities, ThemPra has invested an enormous amount of time to communicate and co-ordinate the events.

## Publications

In our second year we have been even more active in writing publications as this has proven a central way to share developments, address gaps in the literature available and generally increase professionals' understanding of social pedagogy in theory and practice.

- For a new publication edited by Claire Cameron and Peter Moss from the Thomas Coram Research Unit at the Institute of Education, University of London, Gabriel and Sylvia wrote a chapter on the conceptual foundations of social pedagogy. The book, which is due to be published in early 2011, also serves as the handbook for the MA students on the new social pedagogy course at the IoE.
- Gabriel also wrote a chapter for the forthcoming conference proceedings of the History of Youth Work and Community Education conference in 2009 in Durham, organised by Youth & Policy. His chapter describes a historic perspective on social pedagogy.
- The *Children's Webmag* published another special edition on social pedagogy in October 2010 to which we contributed with an article on the Social Pedagogy Development Network and Gabriel's brief articles on the importance of hermeneutics in social pedagogic practice and the notion of *Haltung*.<sup>3</sup>

## Conferences and seminars

In the past year, we also continued to promote social pedagogy at conferences and seminars. Gabriel and one of our first participants from the 2007 NCERCC social pedagogy seminars gave a presentation at an information day in Derbyshire in early February 2010, introducing a group of 80 practitioners from a range of professions and some members of Derbyshire's children in care council to the Social Pedagogy Tree.

Sylvia and Gabriel ran a short seminar at the National Children's Bureau for their staff, which offered opportunities for reflection around the Diamond Model.

Our planned presentation at the FESET conference in late April 2010 was disrupted by the eruptions of Eyjafjallajökull, which grounded our plane to the international conference, but an article about our contribution will hopefully be published in the FESET conference proceedings in 2011.

In June 2010, Sylvia and Gabriel were also at the SIRCC national conference and ran a workshop with around 35 delegates to explore how social pedagogy could connect to their own traditions and conceptual frameworks.

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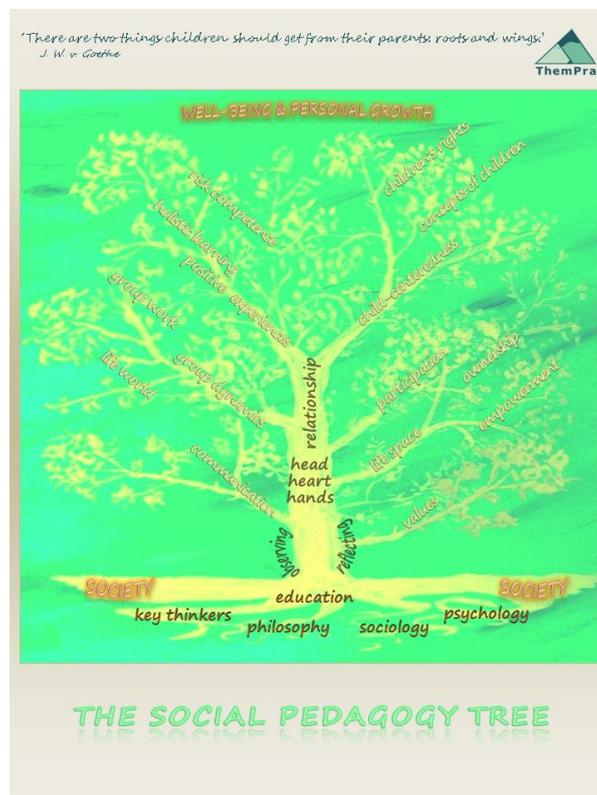
<sup>3</sup> <http://www.childrenwebmag.com/2010/10> (last accessed 07/10/10)

### Website

A further useful tool to increase the understanding of Social Pedagogy is our website, [www.themptra.org.uk](http://www.themptra.org.uk). Rather than just featuring details on our services, it contains a lot of resources about the history of Social Pedagogy, several core theoretic concepts, and descriptions of what the practice of social pedagogues is all about. Within the last year we have further expanded the website and have connected it more to related websites and forums, such as [www.SocialPedagogyUK.com](http://www.SocialPedagogyUK.com), the [www.ChildrenWebmag.com](http://www.ChildrenWebmag.com) and others. As a result our number of visitors has increased to an average of 3500 unique visits monthly, with a total of over 60,000 page visits over the entire year. This demonstrates that the website has become a well-recognised and frequented online resource providing relevant background details rather than be a self-marketing tool.

### Social Pedagogy tree postcards

As a more creative form of raising interest for Social Pedagogy and people's understanding of what it constitutes, we continued to distribute around 400 postcards with a model we have developed to illustrate what Social Pedagogy is about. As the actual understanding of the roots, concepts and elements of Social Pedagogy is still somewhat vague amongst many professionals, these postcards with the so-called Social Pedagogy tree (see below) helped to capture people's interest. In addition to the picture of the Social Pedagogy tree, we attached a small package of tree seeds together with a step-by-step guide for growing a Social Pedagogy tree.



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### ***ThemPra residential***

With the aim to explore further ways in which we can best contribute to the development of social pedagogy and thereby benefit the community of children and young people in care, ThemPra organised another residential at Braziers Park School in Oxfordshire. We invited for this purpose members of several organisations we have been working in close partnership with, including practitioners, academics and leading thinkers in residential child care. Over 3 days in October 2009 we discussed what ThemPra can do collaboratively with other organisations to raise more awareness for social pedagogy, pilot new projects and positively contribute to the wider system and culture.

### **3.3 ACTIVITY STRAND III:**

So far we have not been in a position to acquire funding which would allow us to pursue this activity strand. However, we have continued to develop close contacts with various leading academics and endeavoured to build up ThemPra's profile through the publication of academic articles and other contributions to the professional discourse around social pedagogy. We hope this will provide us with a good platform from which to start some research activities in the near future.

In addition, the ongoing research and evaluation of ThemPra's projects as well as the dissemination of interim results have helped and will continue to help achieve the intended benefits to the community, which are to demonstrate the importance of social pedagogy in developing high-quality practice that is grounded in relevant interdisciplinary theory, humanistic values and children's rights.

### **3.4 ACTIVITY STRAND IV:**

One of the challenges in developing a UK tradition of Social Pedagogy is the difference in training and qualification that practitioners have to undergo to work in residential child care in the UK as compared to social pedagogues in Germany or Denmark, for example. Social Pedagogy is a full-time 3½ year BA degree in most European countries, and not a quickly explained or learned approach. Therefore, ThemPra has been keen on providing accredited learning which will help practitioners to develop their professional understanding of social pedagogy.

In partnership with the University of Lincoln, we developed an accreditation framework for our 6-day course. This course is now accredited through the University, which will award 30 CAT points at level 5 to students who have signed up to do the course as a module. In effect students have to submit two assignments that demonstrate how they have linked the learning from the course to their practice. This accreditation helps participants to develop a reflective and critical understanding of Social Pedagogy with regards to their own practice, and it gives them a personal stake in their professional development. Over the course of this year 22 students signed up to the accreditation, and 9 of them have successfully submitted the assignments.

Based on these experiences and recognising the need to have a practice-based qualification, we also began to develop social pedagogically inspired optional units for the new level 3 children's workforce diploma. However, after a meeting with the *Children's Workforce Development Council* in April 2010, these developments had to be brought to a hold as we became concerned about the lack of quality assurance for the optional units. Until quality standards for delivering courses in social pedagogy has been developed, any optional units would be open to misuse – and this would be detrimental to our aim of promoting social pedagogy. We have therefore decided to prioritise the development of quality standards in collaboration with others, hopefully through the Social Pedagogy Development Network.

## 4. CONCLUSIONS

In our second year, we have continued to grow and refine a range of projects, most notably the Social Pedagogy Development Network. We have also started to see some very positive outcomes of the social pedagogy processes we helped initiate and develop in the first year. The energy and enthusiasm that many of the people we've worked with have brought to these processes has been frequently palpable and reaffirmed us in our belief that social pedagogy has an important contribution to make in creating the best possible conditions for children in care to grow.

It has also become more and more apparent that social pedagogy is about systemic change, not just about practice. Every person within a system has to be involved and has a contribution to make, and every aspect of a system must be considered.

Overall, our second year has continued to take us on a challenging but inspiring journey, and we have been very fortunate to be along this journey together with an increasing circle of people who share our vision of social pedagogy and are dedicated to developing better conditions for children and young people.

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