

# ADOPTION & ATTACHMENT COURSE

## 2006/2007

This course is accredited by the University of Greenwich for 60 Credits at level M level

### Introduction and Rationale

Family Futures is a Social Enterprise established in 1998 to provide an assessment and treatment programme for children who had experienced early trauma and are having attachment difficulties in their foster or adoptive family. Family Futures offers a multi-disciplinary service, with staff having professional training in the following disciplines: psychiatry, educational psychology, paediatrics, social work and drama and creative arts therapy. One of our fundamental principles is that professional staff have a collaborative relationship with parents as we believe that it is ultimately foster parents and adoptive parents who provide the loving context that traumatised children require to enable them to reach their true potential. The professional staff co-work with members of staff who are themselves adoptive parents, one of whom has been through our programme with her family.

The development of Family Futures and its services began almost ten years ago when several of the current staff group were working at the Post Adoption Centre in London and put on a day conference, called 'Make or Break', in collaboration with the national adoptive parents organisation (then called PPIAS, now called Adoption UK). At that conference, a number of adoptive parents gave first hand accounts about how difficult and challenging they had found the parenting of children whom they had adopted as older children, who had experienced early neglect and abuse in their birth families. The experience of these parents was typical of the experience of the 'contemporary' adoptive parent who not only found that their children's behaviour was often extreme, but also found that professional services had little or no understanding of their plight. On the contrary, many parents found, when seeking help from Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services, that they were often blamed for the behaviour of their children rather than it being seen as symptomatic of their children's early traumatic experiences. The team, in conjunction with some parents from Adoption UK, went on to establish an intensive treatment programme based upon American models, adapted to incorporate the needs of families in the UK. The Department of Health funded the initial assessment and treatment programme, which is now regarded as a pioneering and innovative model, which Local Authorities and Health Authorities are seeking to emulate.

The team at Family Futures now comprises of ten full-time members of staff, a Consultant Psychiatrist, a Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist, a Consultant Paediatrician and a Chartered Educational Psychologist. Our supervisor for the therapists is Jeanne Magagna, a qualified Child, Adult and Family Therapist, who is Head of the Psychotherapy Department for Great Ormond Street Hospital for Children. In the past four years, Family Futures has worked with over 300 families and currently has an active caseload of 50 families. Our services have been commissioned by over 40 Local Authorities and Health Authorities. Family Futures is currently running a 2-year attachment training for therapists and psychologist and is frequently called upon to run in-house training for Local Authorities in England, Scotland and Ireland.

### Rationale

Adoption has, since 1926 up until relatively recently, been associated with the placement of babies with infertile couples. However, in the past 20 years, the number of babies placed for adoption has declined dramatically while the number of older children and sibling groups has increased. In 2000, 2,700 children were adopted, an increase of 800 since 1996. Of these adop-

tions, only 200 children were under 1 years of age, while 1,600 children were aged 1-4 years and 800 children were aged 5-9 years. Typically, these children have been removed by Social Services for abuse and neglect and have been placed in foster homes. Most have experienced several failed rehabilitation attempts and contested Care Proceedings and Adoption Hearing. Their early trauma subsequently compounded by multiple moves, uncertainty and confusing contacts with birth relatives. Adopting such traumatised children is a very challenging undertaking. Until the last five years or so, there was very limited recognition by statutory agencies for the need of post-adoption support, counselling and therapy for such families and children. However, thanks in part to the work done by Family Futures, the needs of these children are more generally recognised and statutory services with financial incentives and edicts from central government are having to provide a comprehensive and integrated pre- and post-placement service. The pressure on such services will increase in the next five years, as it is the government's intention to increase the number of children adopted by 40% and to prioritise adoption as the outcome for accommodated children who cannot return to their biological families.

The 1989 Children Act extolled the principle of professionals working in partnership with parents. In the context of adoption, parents are seen as the primary resource for children and services are now being developed to work collaboratively with parents. As mentioned earlier, this is a primary principle of Family Futures' service and we have sought to model this in the structure of the course that we are providing by opening it out to both social workers and parents. Similarly, because this area of post-placement provision is relatively new and Family Futures has pioneered the form that such services should take, we believe that training for parents and professionals is essential in helping the development of similar services around the country.

In the past ten years, post-qualifying training for Social Workers has become established; however, the courses remain generic and general in their orientation. Currently, there are no post-qualifying courses for Social Workers that specialise in the family placement, attachment and adoption. With the growing emphasis on adoption, there clearly is a need for such a course and we believe that this course, as we have developed it, would meet such a need. For foster carers and adoptive parents, there are no systematic trainings, only informal preparation groups. This course, in addition to the value of collaborative learning in partnership with professionals, is designed to equip the contemporary parent with a comprehensive understanding of the impact of trauma, the nature of attachment difficulties, the range of possible interventions and programmes of parenting strategies in order that they might better engage in the complex task of parenting and be able to impart their skills and knowledge to other parents on a formal and informal basis.

### **Mode of Delivery Year 1**

The course is part-time, over one year, comprising three terms of ten weeks, for one day a week (Tuesday). The course runs from 2.00 pm - 6.00 pm. Making a total teaching hours of 156 hours and 100 hours of self directed learning. In addition, there will be three weekend workshops focussing on a particular aspect of the curriculum, the first in October will be a two day workshop on therapeutic work with traumatised children run by Dr D Hughes (Psychologist), the second in March will be a two day weekend workshop run by two parent mentors Ann Kitson and Christine Gordon from Family Futures on Practical Parenting Strategies. The third in June is a two-day workshop run by Jay Vaughan Drama Therapist and Alan Burnell Social Worker from Family Futures on the use of Creative Arts Techniques in Therapeutic Work with Children. The workshops will be run from 10.00am – 4.00pm each day representing a further 36 hours of direct teaching using experiential methods.

### **Entry Requirements and Pre-requisites**

The course is designed for Social Care and Health Professionals e.g. Social Workers Psychologists, Nurse Practitioners. We would expect them to have completed their basic professional qualification and have three years post-qualifying experience, normally working in the field of family placement. We are asking the agency or sponsor for their support of the participant in having sufficient time to participate in the course fully.

There would be a formal interview with the Course Director at which the potential participant would have to demonstrate:

- The complexities and dilemmas inherent in working in the field of fostering and adoption.**
- A desire to change their own practice and to enhance their level of skill**
- To read core texts identified during the course as relevant.**
- To have a basic understanding of attachment theory and its relevance to the field of fostering and adoption.**
- A basic competence in project management and an ability to integrate theory into practice.**

These participants may wish to gain the credit rating relevant to this course; this will be discussed at the point of interview.

The course is a flexible learning environment with a range of learning outcomes. For some course participants there may be no desire to formalise their learning or to accrue learning credits. They may wish to participate in the course purely to develop their own practice and to enhance their own knowledge and skill base. This group of course participants are likely to be Social Carers in the form of Foster Carers and/or Adoptive Parents. These participants would normally have;

- Three years experience as a foster carer or an adoptive parent.**
- Be expected to have agency sponsorship a social care role and or a mentoring role with other social carers and parents.**
- To ensure the participant can meet the written and academic requirements of the course we would expect them to have a first degree or equivalent.**
- Some understanding of the complexities and dilemmas inherent in participating in the field of fostering and adoption.**
- A desire to change their own practice and to enhance their level of skill**
- A capacity to read core texts identified during the course as relevant.**
- A basic understanding of attachment theory and its relevance to the field of fostering and adoption.**
- A basic competence in project management and an ability to integrate theory into practice.**

There would be a formal interview with the Course Director at which the potential participant would have to demonstrate the core skills identified above.

Should foster carers or adoptive parents wish to gain the credit rating offered by the course, they would be formally assessed in the same way as the professional participants.

## **Aims and Intended Outcomes Year 1**

### **Aims**

- To provide an in depth knowledge of the theoretical concepts and research-base related to psychological trauma in early childhood and its impact upon physiological, psychological and physical development of the children and their subsequent relationships with primary carers.
- To provide a structure for collaborative discussion and critical reflection on theoretical perspectives of and contemporary issues in, adoption and attachment as they relate to participants current practice.
- To provide an integrated learning environment where professionals and parents can pursue a programme of collaborative practice development and self-learning.

### **Outcomes**

- An understanding of the legal, social and organisational context of adoption and fostering services in the UK and their historical development.

- An awareness of the evidence base relating to the impact of trauma on child development
- An ability to analyse and interpret a range of work based situations integrating appropriate theoretical concepts
- For the participant to gain an understanding of how the child's best interest and child protection issues can be kept at the forefront of good practice in the field of fostering and adoption

### **Indicative Content**

#### **The course content will address the following issues:**

- The socio-legal framework context of current service provision.
- The multi disciplinary context of contemporary practice and the contribution that psychological and medical disciplines can make.
- Assessment frameworks for assessing parents, children and families.
- Different forms of therapeutic interventions with individuals, children and families.
- Anti discriminatory practice
- Project planning and research methodology

The full of the content of the course is detailed in the programme for the first year. Our overriding aim for the first year of the course is to explore the many dimensions that constitute the complex interweaving of theories and research that constitute the "big picture" of adoption today. This would provide the backdrop for the second year of the course which would focus more on the integration of these theories and research findings into the participants evolving practice.

### **Pattern of Learning Activities**

It is unusual for therapists, social workers and parent mentors to learn together further, the formal teaching takes place at Family Futures, which is primarily a practice based agency and not an academic institution. Both if these makes this course unique and provides an opportunity for practitioners, parents and experts to meet together to address key issues in the field and to interpret their relevance and application into both the professional domain of therapists, social workers and nurse practitioners and the private domain of parents and carers. During the course of the group discussions and the experiential exercises, course facilitators endeavour to encourage an atmosphere of openness, shared experience, and critical reflection. There is strong ethos that parents, professional and experts have equal status and an equal contribution to our understanding of the process of fostering and adoption. The use of role play, the active participation in the use of the creative arts, the use of video as a feedback mechanism all contribute along with the reading, formal presentations and the written work to a multi streamed approach to learning.

Approximately one-third of the time spent in the first year during the weekly sessions at Family Futures, will be formal presentations given by Family Futures staff and external experts. Another third of the time will be spent in informal group discussion and the final third will be spent either doing experiential course related exercises, analysing videoed material, or direct work with clients under supervision. Participants will be expected to have read core text, listed in the appendix, during the course of the year. The structure of each day will be part formal teaching, part experiential and part group session.

Each participant will have tutorials with the course director who will meet them two times a term and who will supervise their direct practice and oversee the participants learning during the course. On occasion participants will have access to other members of Family Futures staff if they wish to discuss a particular area which is the expertise of that member of staff e.g. Parent Mentoring with a Parent Mentor.

The weekend workshops provide a different learning environment for the participants. The two consecutive days focused on one primary area enables in depth learning and an opportunity for a more experiential approach. Participants are encouraged to practice with each other skills, techniques and examine case material that is presented to them by the workshop convener. Video examples of family interactions, family work, or child assessments will be given to the participants to analyse and reflect upon.

Towards the end of the first year some of the weekly sessions held at Family Futures will provide a forum for participants to present to the group examples of their own practice or relevant theoretical frameworks that they have become aware of, or concerns or dilemmas they have, for discussion with their peers. These participant led elements to the teaching come as a foretaste of the second year where there is greater emphasis on participant led learning and presentations. During the course of the first year there is a gradual shift in teaching style from external expert and formal teaching to a more participant led informal presentation style. This also reflects a shift not only in style but in content from academic, theoretical to a more practice based integrative and experiential emphasis leading to more self directed learning. In the first year, participant presentations are not compulsory, but in the second year they are.

### **YEAR 2 Mode of Delivery**

#### **Mode of Delivery will take the form of:**

- Presentations in large groups given by teaching staff.
- One presentation per term held will involve a formal presentation by an outside expert on an issue of contemporary relevance.
- Student case presentations to fellow course participants and teaching staff in small group settings where the participants will engage in reflective criticism of each other's practice.
- There will be 2x1 hour tutorials a term per participant with the course convener, making a total of 6 hours per year, in addition to the direct teaching time.

These activities, will take place over 3 half days per term, over a 3 term year making a total of 4 and a half days of formal teaching. Participants will carry out the equivalent of a further 7 and a half days per term of self directed learning.

### **Entry requirements and pre-requisites**

Participants for the Contemporary Adoption and Attachment Course will have successfully completed the course requirements and assessments for the Adoption and Attachment Course Year 1.

### **Aims**

The aims of the Contemporary Adoption and Attachment Course are to:

- Provide a forum for participants to continue to develop their knowledge of contemporary theory and international research in the fields of adoption, family placement, attachment and child trauma.
- Enable participants to further develop the skills and resources required for self directed learning and to provide a multi-disciplinary and service user peer group in which to do this.
- Create an opportunity to integrate theory and practice in the above fields into their role within their sponsoring agency or organisation at a policy and practice level and to develop innovative application tools.
- To develop skills in the presentation and communication of complex theoretical concepts and practical applications.

### **Learning Outcomes**

- Further develop and extend the participants knowledge and understanding of the social, legal, psychological and neurological context of contemporary adoption theory and practice.
- By the end of the course participants will have further developed their capacity for reflective criticism and their ability to analyse and assess complex theoretical and research material and be able to integrate this with their current practice in the field of adoption.
- Participants will be able to have developed a practical 'tool' based on contemporary theory and

practice in adoption that is innovative and has an application within their agency.

- Participants will be able to present complex information in a meaningful and coherent way using a variety of media.

### **Indicative content**

- Exploration of the more complex aspects of the social, legal, psychological and neurological knowledge bases and their application to the field to child trauma, attachment and adoption.

This will include the following topics:

- Working alone versus Co-working: structural issues and interpersonal dynamics of service delivery
- Children's contact with birth family members post placement: continuity or contamination? The form, function and impact of contact on children's ability to form new attachments.
- Gay and lesbian parenting: second class parents for second class children? An exploration of gender and anti-oppressive practice
- Executive Functioning Disorder: new developments in our understanding of the neurobiology of cognitive development
- Adult attachment assessments in the selection of adoptive parents: who and what are we looking for? Implications for the matching process.
- Trauma and attachment therapy: trauma resolution or re-traumatisation? The fine line for effective post placement therapy.

### **Pattern of main learning and teaching activities**

- There will be 4 primary learning streams
- Family Futures teaching staff and outside experts presenting on contemporary aspects of adoption trauma and attachment theory and research. This will occur once a term. The topics will be determined by the participant course group at the beginning of the year. The topics will either be expansions, an elaboration on issues covered in the first year or the introduction of new topics relevant to the course content.
- Developing an innovative practice initiative within their own agency, exploring the impact of organisational constraints and the application of anti-discriminatory and anti-oppressive practices to the field of adoption and family permanence.
- Participants will be expected to read and explore the relevant literature, meet and discuss with relevant experts or practitioners as part of a general process of self direct learning and exploration of course related topics.
- Presentations by students on topics relevant to the course and their work experience and critical reflection by peers and teachers on the student's presentation.

The participants will be encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning experience and to seek out sources of information, consultation and support. There will also be a greater focus on the second year on integrating course based learning into work based settings with an awareness of the broader organisation and anti-discriminatory issues that arise from this process.

### **Assessment**

1. Completion of a 4,600 word paper outlining a role-based practice application initiative undertaken by the participant in Year 2 which will be marked by the Course Director using the University of Greenwich grading criteria.
2. Participants will at the end of the course make a presentation to the course group and teachers, using whatever medium they choose that will demonstrate their ability to present a coherent account of the application of learning from the course to their own agency based practice.

**The assessment will be rated at 30 M-level credits.**

## **Staffing and Management**

Alan Burnell will have overall responsibility for the nature and content of the course. In addition, there will be input on the course from our consultants:

- Dr Deborah Hodes, Consultant Community Paediatrician
- Dr Richard Lansdown, Chartered Educational Psychologist
- Dr Dan Hughes, Psychologist
- Caroline Archer, Adoptive Parent and Author
- Adrian Briggs, Local Authority Consultant
- Christine Gordon, Parent Mentor
- Dr David Howe, Professor of Social Work
- Griselda Kellie-Smith, Therapist
- Jeanne Magagna – Child Psychotherapist
- Cris Nikolov – Neuro-Developmental Therapist
- Antonio Bifulco – Lecturer & Researcher

A full-time Resource and Systems Manager will be responsible for the administration and day-to-day running of the course. The course will be held at Family Futures Attachment Centre, 35a Britannia Row, Islington, London N1 8QH. Facilities available are a small library with relevant books and research papers. Family Futures is a member of the National Children's Bureau in Islington. Course participants will have access to their library. On site, the course will use a training room, supplemented by smaller group discussion rooms, video camera, video playback facilities. They will also have access to the considerable resources that the centre has for therapeutic play with the children.