

## Simon – A Play Therapist in Social Services

As a Play Therapist for a London Borough's Social Services department, my principle task is to provide Play Therapy services to 'looked after' children and their families and carers. The purpose of this is to enable the child to understand what is happening to them and to boost their resilience and self-esteem through what is a difficult and uncertain time. This means direct work with the child or sometimes just with their carers using a mixture of directive and non-directive techniques in order to facilitate the child's expression of their 'narrative' or story of what has happened to them.

Working with looked after children it means that there are a lot of other professionals with whom I have to liaise in order to build up a full picture of the child and their abilities and difficulties and so I regularly meet with and talk to colleagues. Despite the hectic nature of this task I find it important to have time to plan, write-up and reflect on the work I do and sharing experiences with colleagues is invaluable. Children are usually referred when their behaviour is of concern and hard to understand. A successful outcome is when these behaviour concerns are lessened and the overall needs of the child are better understood. This is evaluated by the professional team, with the carers and most importantly with the child themselves.

I have worked with looked after children for over 20 years and have considerable experience of a wide range of work settings. The work is tough and challenging but the capacity for change within the children is enormous and seeing children learn to express their thoughts and feelings is rewarding. My background is in Drama and Drama Therapy and I was interested in how people act out roles to express different facets of their identity. Play Therapy seemed a natural progression when I began to work with younger children and family groups and I saw play as an important medium for both creativity and development of relationships. I believe patience, persistence and resilience are important

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qualities needed in the work allied with a firm understanding of my own emotional responses and how these can inform and help me understand what the children experience. I have come across perceptions of Play Therapy as being a fun time in which only superficial issues can be addressed. I would like to think that 'fun' is a component of what I do but that profound and meaningful emotions and experiences can be accessed and understood in the play therapy room as well.



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