

Social Pedagogy – Theory into Practice

Case Example from a Scottish Residential Care Unit

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BACKGROUND

The young person in question was a 14 year old boy from family that had been fractured by intervention. The young person (I will call him Billy to protect his identity) and his younger sister were removed into care. Billy's older sister and little brother were allowed to remain in the parental home. There were significant concerns about the impact of the parents' drinking. This was impairing their capacity to parent and putting the children at risk.

Billy presented in a very rough and tumble manner and was very much a boy's boy who liked his sports and had dabbled in boxing and football in the past. There were serious concerns about Billy also in respect to him presenting at the unit under the influence of unknown substances and possibly getting involved in drug dealing in his home community.

Billy presented as a charming and likeable boy who had a great sense of humour and was very playful with staff and young people on a good day. On a bad day or when Billy was let down by his parents or rejected in some other way things were very different. There was a deep resentment present in Billy. He was very angry at having to come into care when his siblings had been allowed to stay at home and was confused about what he had done that was so wrong compared to others. When Billy's temper got the better of him he would act out in all kinds of hostile ways. This ranged from rampaging around the unit and creating a mess with toiletries, food, etc. – maximum effect for the minimum effort kind of a deal – through to being violent and antagonistic towards other young people and care staff. This led Billy into serious trouble with the police on more than one occasions.

INTERVENTION

From early on in the placement I could recognise the positive qualities in Billy and found I was able to relate to him and build a relationship with ease. On reflection I was clearly subscribing to the Diamond Model that I had learnt about while attending the 10-day session with ThemPra at SIRCC. I set about with a dual approach of helping to bring the best out in Billy, i.e. uncovering the diamond. I had also learned that helping Billy to see the best in situations or other people was important too.

Initially Billy was wary of my attention and wanted to know why it mattered to me what he thought or how he felt about things. He would tell me that I was only interested because I had to be and was paid to. I worked hard at building an authentic and genuine relationship with Billy as I had been reminded that this was crucial to a helping relationship as underpinned by pedagogical principles.

Billy had returned one evening and had been particularly excited by some rap music he had been listening to. I could relate to the passion he was expressing and feeling about his music. I could see an opportunity for developing a Common Third with Billy. This was a concept that I had learned on

the social pedagogy course. By using a Common Third we can build a relationship with others. The Common Third refers to a task or goal that the social pedagogue can work towards with those that they are supporting. It is ultimately better for this task to be something that is new to you both. This way you can grow and learn alongside one another. Ultimately the opportunity for the person being supported to become the teacher would mean the process was at its most effective.

I supported Billy and another young person to create new rap. They spoke eagerly about presenting their material and going on to *Britain's got Talent*. I found their rap to be genuinely interesting as they would express their thoughts and feelings about coming from the poor council estates and having to survive – much like their American rap icons. I made suggestions about laying down beats and they used music on their phones to rap over the top of and keep them in time. We had discussions about style and content, the need to try and keep it clean. For Billy he went on to produce a CD with the help of another agency and was so very proud to bring this back to the unit and play it for me.

The Common Third took another spin with the invention of a rap pad. Billy was escalating in his outbursts and verbal abuse towards those around them. I spent time reflecting with Billy about how upsetting others found this. Billy was also able to appreciate that the behaviour was working against himself and it was counterproductive. I was able to acknowledge that Billy was and could become very angry about his life. I told Billy that I thought this was OK but that he needed to find other ways to express his anger. We spoke about Eminem and how he has used his music to express some of his darker feelings and thoughts about things. Billy and I came up with the idea of a rap pad. This was for Billy's eyes only and he did go on to treasure this and use this to record his raps and thoughts about things that bothered him.

REFLECTIONS

Billy actually ended up moving on to a full-time place at a residential school and as a parting gift the unit provided him with an mp3 player and rap music to focus on when times got tough. The residential school was a very positive outcome for Billy, who soon flourished with their structure, routine and love of sports. Billy and I became quite close during the time he was with us and I believe that the pedagogical approach helped me to promote a healthy attachment with the young person also. This relationship provided a buffer between Billy and some of the other team members, who struggled when he acted out and pushed their buttons over certain issues.

The most important elements to the pedagogical approach for me are to accept the individual for who they are and to be able to see them for the person they can become. To not judge them for how they are presenting but to understand why these things are happening and to help them on the way to their personal healing. Putting the relationship at the heart of everything we do and being creative in how we support the children to grow and learn were also valuable lessons for me.

I was very intrigued by this style of working and continue to raise the profile of social pedagogy in my council. I am looking for the best in everyone now, an exhausting process because it is easier to think that some children are evil or can never change. But also with other adults and parents I need to find the redeemable qualities to help them feel more positive about themselves and their families. I look forwards to wherever the social pedagogy trek will take me.