

As life is beginning to show signs of returning to some sort of normal, I have reflected upon the last few months.

The impact of COVID-19 on all of us has been significant. The levels of fear, trauma and anxiety generated has varied depending on our individual circumstances and some of us have struggled more than others. I'm sure we will all agree that local, national and social media have contributed greatly in generating huge amounts of additional alarm, panic and distress due to the sensationalised headlines we have been bombarded with during this pandemic.

Our anxieties and fears have peaked at times, and even if we have been fortunate and not directly affected by the virus, most of us have experienced worry for other members of our family, extended family and friends.

I've acknowledged the additional strain placed on our foster families; having to manage the worry and needs of all the children and young people within our foster homes. It wouldn't surprise me if Foster carers and our staff team have felt totally overwhelmed at times with the new responsibilities placed on them – to home school for example. I've acknowledged the changes in our role as parents and carers - alongside juggling school work, many of us have had additional care responsibilities (such as shopping for those in the shielded category) and many of us have faced financial worries too due to the closure of many business's and services during the peak of the Government's social distancing rules.

We can all agree it has been hard, and for many of our families it continues to be hard. Having said all of that, I recognise some of the positives which have also been shared by staff and foster families. Many of our children and young people are enjoying the increased amount of one to one time spent with their carers which is having a more settling impact on them. Many of us have embraced this time to enjoy our family time and develop new skills or focus on interests that have previously been difficult to find the time for. My intention is to acknowledge the impact of Covid-19 on us all, and to reflect on how well we have pulled together as a Fostering Service to support one another by remaining in close contact despite the difficulties.

It is wonderful that Nottinghamshire County Council is investing in providing a therapeutic service and I have always felt privileged to be a part of that. I'm sure we can all agree that now is a more important time than ever to continue evolving in this way. My colleagues and I within the **Fostering Support Team**, alongside colleagues from our district teams across the service are committed to developing a relational model of therapeutic support and intervention for children young people and their foster carers. This draws on the latest research in neuroscience and trauma informed practice. My starting point has always been the view that 'if the adults around a child are not ok, then children and young people definitely will not be'. We are mindful of the key role foster carers play in the healing process of our children and young people, and we acknowledge the challenges faced by us all over the last few months.

I read an article by Sheela Raja Ph.D 'Surviving and Thriving After Trauma' in Psychology Today which is relevant to us all. It considers the self-help narrative that has emerged out of these recent difficult times; the idea that 'we are going to emerge out of this period of social distancing as better people' and this is attributed to the assumption that we will learn gratitude, have improved relationships, and learn new skills for example. For some of us this is true, but Sheela stresses how this idea can set us up for failure. This is particularly true for those who already struggle with anxiety, depression, loneliness, financial pressures, abuse, and chronic health. Sheela recognises the frightening disruption this pandemic has had on daily life and how it may also have triggered trauma responses for others. Sheela points out 5 useful facts and strategies that may be useful in the weeks and months ahead and I would recommend this. It can be found here:

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/gb/blog/surviving-and-thriving-after-trauma>

Another recommended reading would be 'The Body Keeps the Score' by acclaimed trauma expert Bessel Van der Kolk who considers the impact of toxic stress and trauma on our body and provides an excellent understanding of the effects of trauma on brain development and attachment systems. The therapeutic interventions he suggests are based on a whole system approach and are 'relational' which fit well with our Therapeutic approach.

As a practitioner in DDP, alongside my colleagues we all encourage and support an attitude of P.A.C.E. with our children and young people. I would encourage us all; Foster Carers, parents and staff to extend and apply this approach and attitude to ourselves. For example, we need to acknowledge and **Accept** the feelings and worries we have. We also need to practice using **Empathy** towards our-selves. The importance of 'human connection' is something that many of us see as a positive realisation following this period of social isolation. It is also the very thing that will help us as adults heal too so that we can support the emotional wellbeing of our children and

young people. This will remain our therapeutic focus. Members of my team are developing and planning various workshops which will focus on the impact of trauma, attachment separation and loss. These will be rolled out over the coming months.

I am looking forward to providing updates and information relating to our therapeutic approach and would welcome any information that others may wish to share or may want more information about. Please contact your Supervising Social worker or me directly if you have any thoughts, ideas, or if you have any questions.

I thought this picture that I took recently conveys a positive message to us all as we begin to emerge tentatively out of social isolation. This is of my daughter Hope... at the end of a rainbow!



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