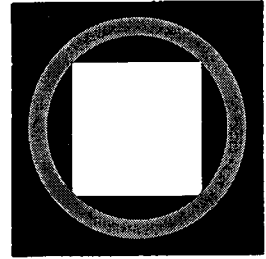


Centre Profile

**Stockton Psychotherapy
Training Institute**

***The Story of
the Institute***

Sarah Greening and Annie Peart



**STOCKTON
PSYCHOTHERAPY
TRAINING
INSTITUTE**

The story of Stockton Psychotherapy Training Institute begins in the autumn of 1977. Christine Lister-Ford was studying Psychology and Jennie McNamara worked as a social worker in a day centre for people with mental illness when they met. Shortly after, Christine accompanied Jennie on a social services residential holiday for people experiencing the effects of schizophrenia. Finding they worked well together, and shared similar values and ideals, they began to create a common vision that was eventually to become Stockton. Between 1977 and 1982 Christine and Jennie developed a counselling and psychotherapy practice and set up short training courses. As their work expanded, they needed new premises. They decided to buy a large 4-storey house in Thornaby in Cleveland and build up a centre that would have impact and influence. And so, after several years' gestation, Stockton Psychotherapy Training Institute was born.

Building on their previous training and experience Christine and Jennie decided to undertake further training in psychotherapy, commuting regularly to London. They found this training challenging and enriching, demanding great commitment to their personal and professional development. Once they were tempted, fleetingly, to move south, where the traditions of psychotherapy and counselling were well-established and flourishing. However, they stayed, firmly believing that the north-east needed their input and commitment.

Their ideas and vision crystallised further and in 1985 Stockton started a 3-year training programme for counsellors. This professional training is officially recognised by the British Association for Counselling and is now in its seventh year, with new students joining the

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programme annually.

In 1989 Stockton began a 4-year professional training in T.A. psychotherapy, now in its sixth year and accredited by the United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapy for the purposes of Registration. Stockton also offers a Diploma in Psychotherapy. Students can select a core theoretical model from amongst a range of humanistic psychotherapies including Gestalt and TA.

As Stockton's reputation has grown, so too have the number of clients and trainees. There are now 15 psychotherapists, counsellors and supervisors working with individuals and groups. And in addition to the rich resources of those working from within Stockton, practitioners from other parts of Britain, Europe and the United States make regular inputs.

In January 1991 Stockton began a training programme for supervisors: the Certificate in the Practice of Supervision. This is part of an expanding programme to develop and maintain professional standards in counselling and psychotherapy. Many participants come from the public sector, where there is now a growing awareness of the need to train supervisors.

For several years there has been a focus on couples work at the Institute. A group for couples runs fortnightly and counselling for individual couples is also available. For those interested in a professional training, Stockton offers a Certificate in Integrative Systemic Therapy in Couples.

Stockton has always had a particular affinity with Gestalt, one of the choices of core theoretical model for the Diploma in Humanistic Counselling. Gestalt work-

shops are run regularly at the Institute, by both in-house trainers and trainers from the UK and abroad.

The Institute runs a dynamic workshop programme throughout the year, continually updated to remain responsive to the needs of clients and trainees. Workshops in the past few years have addressed themes such as bereavement, food and nurturance, body work, dream work and gender issues, amongst others.

Each year a residential workshop takes place, either in South West France or in a beautiful local dale, for people to experience living and working together away from their everyday setting, in a place where they can focus on personal issues and take time to enjoy themselves.

Stockton has always been concerned to look outwards and to relate to the wider community in the north-east. As a result of psychotherapy and counselling placements within GPs' surgeries, GP patients have reported a reduction in anxiety, depression, and stress-related difficulties, as well as a generally enhanced quality of life. At the same time trainees benefit greatly from their placements by deepening their understanding of counselling and psychotherapy, and expanding the range and flexibility of their skills.

GPs have shown considerable interest in accepting trainees from the Institute for placements, and there are now trainees working in over fifty surgeries. Over the past five years the Institute has provided an average of 156.5 hours of psychotherapy and counselling each week to clients within primary healthcare settings. We are currently conducting research into the effectiveness of counselling in primary healthcare settings with support and

financial assistance from the Northern Primary Care Research Network. The report on the pilot project, in which over 200 former clients were asked to give their views on the effectiveness of their counselling, will be published early in the autumn and a further study will begin at the same time.

In the event of a disaster in Cleveland, Stockton has undertaken to provide a voluntary emergency counselling service. This means Stockton would provide counsellors to work with victims, survivors or relatives

of a major disaster. The Institute liaises with Cleveland County Council so that this service is ready to be put into operation immediately, should the need arise.

In June Stockton celebrated its first decade. In the last ten years it has gained a solid national reputation, and is becoming increasingly well known internationally. We do, however, remain firmly committed to the local area in whose soil those two small seeds first took root and grew to be much larger than the sum of their individual parts.



Discussion at Institute seminar; inset, founders Christine Lister-Ford and Jennie McNamara

Our Philosophy

Charlotte Johnson and Yvonne Lawrence

The Stockton Psychotherapy Training Institute sits in the heart of a deprived area. Teesside in the North East of England suffers high unemployment, poverty and urban decay. Our philosophy is to offer a crucial resource, serving an enormous range of people, from many walks of life and a wide geographical area.

We are constantly seeking ways to make links with the broader community. In 1990 Stockton set up the Cleveland Counselling Charitable Trust to promote awareness of counselling and therapy, and to provide services to people who would not otherwise have access to them.

The Institute also actively resources the local community through trainee placements in general practices. This not only benefits the many individual clients but also raises GPs' awareness of the potential of psychotherapy and counselling.

To foster education — so important for the healthy development of individuals and communities — we create learning opportunities for the general public under the auspices of the ITA Education Network, part of the Institute of Transactional Analysis. We also host an annual two-day Conference which has become increasingly well supported and successful, offering a variety of workshops on topics relevant to people working in education and the helping professions.

Though strongly rooted in the North-east we actively connect with other regions, keeping in touch with develop-

ments and issues at a national and international level. Our training programmes now attract people from all over Great Britain and from abroad, as well as from the immediate area. We forge international links by inviting trainers from other countries to offer and participate in workshops at the Institute. One of Stockton's directors, Jennie McNamara, was a member of a party of psychotherapists who visited Russia in 1990 to create links with practitioners in the ex-Soviet Union.

Since that time two Russian colleagues have been given training bursaries. Trainers visit Russia each year with the specific task of providing live supervision and the Russians spend a month at Stockton each year focusing on theoretical learning and personal development.

Stockton's Humanistic Philosophy

The theories of psychotherapy we practise and teach at the Institute include Transactional Analysis, Gestalt and Rogerian Person-centred therapy. These humanistic therapies provide a strong philosophical base for our work.

We believe in the essential goodness of humanity and in the individual's innate striving to grow in healthy ways. We respect the uniqueness of each person and their right to live life in their own way.

We believe in people's abilities to make changes and to achieve autonomy given the right climate. We endeavour to create

that climate in a number of ways. Much time and energy, for example, has been given to creating an environment which is nourishing and aesthetically pleasing. Our building is creatively decorated and furnished comfortably to signal care and respect for the people who use it.

We encourage intimacy and contact and promote a sense of community in various ways. To foster a sense of belonging and to promote personal responsibility and caring of one another, we do not use signs or labels in our building. Social events such as Christmas parties and summer picnics include all Stockton users — clients, therapists and trainees, as well as their families. This encourages people to meet in a social setting where they can enjoy themselves and bring together those from different aspects of their lives.

Clearly, within the context of humanistic psychotherapy, we believe in the importance of relationship — the genuine meeting of two people as a means of creating a climate for growth and development. The respect and genuineness so crucial to the therapeutic relationship is something we seek to bring to all our relationships; trainer to trainee, supervisor to supervisee, therapist to client, therapist to therapist or client to client.

Learning at Stockton

We are aware of the importance of promoting our humanistic philosophy in the learning environment. Often, people's prior experience of learning has emphasised conformity, adaptation, and rote learning, stifling creativity and natural excitement. Consequently, people often arrive filled with anxiety and negative expectations.

What they find are trainings which take account of their particular individual needs. This is achieved through providing high challenge and high support accompanied by permission to go at one's own pace and develop in one's own way. One example of this in practice is the modular nature of all trainings, which allows flexibility for people who may want to take a year out to assimilate what they have learnt before proceeding further.

A second example of meeting individual needs is the strong emphasis on people going forward for qualifying examinations only when they are able to recognise their own readiness — on a personal as well as at a professional level — rather than because this is an externally imposed requirement. At that point, they can go forward to the exam in a spirit of affirmation of their professional and personal readiness for accreditation.

Many aspects of the process common to all examinations illustrate our philosophy in practice. Whilst the exam provides a stimulating and challenging opportunity to discuss theoretical and professional issues with the exam board, there is also a well-defined system including personal support partners and a day which is structured to provide encouragement, nurture, affirmation and, for those who want it, a celebration complete with champagne and balloons.

So, in terms of examinations, and learning generally, the spirit is one of providing a positive experience where the focus is on learning opportunities.

Trainees are encouraged to use their training flexibly to develop their own particular styles of practising. One trainee who is also an artist is actively developing

ways of integrating her art and psychotherapy. Another has integrated her counselling training into her professional development as a natural healer.

All trainees at Stockton undergo personal psychotherapy as a requirement of training. This provides a facilitative framework within which students can address their own therapeutic issues. Such in-depth, first-hand experience not only equips individuals with an inner map of the therapeutic journey, but helps to promote the skills that are necessary if their clinical practice is to be informed, potent and effective. Though personal therapy is considered essential and integral to development as a practitioner, there is also a clear distinction made between it and the formal learning situation. During personal therapy students have privacy to unfold at their own pace, whilst theoretical learning is kept distinct from personal process, to help maximise clear conceptual understanding.

Although trainees receive a high level of support they are encouraged to take personal responsibility for their learning. They are also accountable for the maintenance of their professional practice and standards, which includes responsibility to the profession as a whole. Students are encouraged to participate in conferences and other national psychotherapy and counselling arenas.

Accountability applies at all levels, from the trainee or graduate who needs to monitor his or her own ongoing supervision needs, to the organisational level. We have made ourselves accountable by submitting our training courses for accreditation by UKCP and British Association of Counselling (BAC), and

holding membership of the European Association of Psychotherapy (EAP) and founder member status of the European Association for Counselling (EAC). Stockton's directors are active in promoting professional standards through their work. Christine Lister-Ford is currently the Co-chair of the Training Standards Committee of the International Transactional Analysis Association (ITAA), Chairperson of the Supervision Committee of EAP and a member of the EAP Journal editorial board. Jennie McNamara is a founding member of the Committee of the Gestalt Association UK, a member of the Courses Recognition Group of the BAC, Chairperson of the Professional Issues Working Group of EAC, and Co-chair of the ITAA Task Force on Counselling.

Stockton's Developing Organisation

Stockton has responsibility for over 150 trainees through its programmes in Humanistic Psychotherapy, Humanistic Counselling, Transactional Analysis, Supervision and Couples work. The number of psychotherapists and counsellors, not to mention support staff, working at the Institute has expanded greatly within the last two years.

This rapid expansion — which is in itself a sign of the dynamism, energy and commitment which we believe to be features of our organisation — has also posed some serious challenges. We continue to grapple with issues like how to keep our philosophy and spirit of openness alive and growing in the face of the increased bureaucracy that is an inevitable part of an expanding organisation. A cohesive community and an ethos of personal com-

munication were easier to foster when numbers were smaller.

However, the challenge is being positively met and active attention is being paid to keeping Stockton personal — a place where individuals, whether they come for therapy, training, or supervision, can feel that they belong and have a voice.

One of the ways in which we have achieved this is by creating working groups which focus on various aspects of the Institute's life, such as a Membership Committee, an Ethics and Professional Practices Committee, a Social Committee, and Training Standards Committees on which clients, trainees and graduates

serve. In this way the policy and developments at Stockton are informed by the views of its members.

Another initiative is a termly magazine which provides a forum for everybody's views and keeps us all up to date with what is going on generally at Stockton.

The current emphasis of the Institute is on growth, with all the vitality and excitement this entails. At the same time we are committed to maintaining person-to-person contact and ensuring that our humanistic philosophy continues to translate into practice, through the unique valuing of every individual who has contact with Stockton.

My Experience of Stockton

Sarah Hamlyn

I first heard about Stockton Psychotherapy Training Institute about six years ago, from friends in training and therapy there. From that time on, I had a feeling deep down somewhere, that sooner or later I would find my way to its door.

Sure enough, about five years ago, I found myself sitting in one of the large, comfortable rooms, looking after a child for a friend attending therapy. While playing with the child, inwardly I was plucking up courage to ask one of the directors, who happened to be sitting in the room, about the possibility of joining the Diploma in Humanistic Counselling training course. I had been interested in counselling for some time, and was considering doing some kind of professional training. On some less articulate level I

also knew that I needed a safe, strong haven which would offer support and challenge, where I could explore my feelings, my past, my present existence, and find out more clearly how I want to live my life.

I was accepted on to the course. I heard the news while living abroad, and after some deliberation I decided to come home and follow the road that was opening before me, with all its uncertainties, challenges and excitements. I realised I could either carry on as I was, or come back and 'face the music'. Perhaps on some level I recognised that only by listening to my inner symphony could I really change the way I was living my life. In deciding to learn how to truly meet others, I had decided to truly meet myself.

I arrived back to my first training weekend, and found myself meeting new people, new ideas and already learning new things about myself. Very soon I started my psychotherapy — a course requirement at Stockton, and for me one of the reasons why I chose this course. This initially bewildering, continually challenging, deeply fascinating and rewarding experience has proven more essential than I could ever have guessed in my development as a counsellor. My inner learning through therapy weaves in and out of my theoretical and experiential learning in training, so that my understanding of the art of counselling can become a richer tapestry than would otherwise be possible. Those therapy threads, my own inner experiences of light and dark, movement and stuckness, insight and confusion, contact and isolation, allow me to empathise more fully with my clients as they go on their journey.

As I have progressed in my training at Stockton I have been encouraged to weave an ever richer and more exciting cloth, introducing new elements which enable me to experience new aspects of myself and to find new strengths, face new challenges.

In my second year of training I started work with clients under regular supervision. In this way I have been able to put my learning into practice and to get individual help with developing my counselling skills. Supervision has given me the opportunity to identify skills gaps and questions to take back to my training. It also helps to identify any of my own unresolved therapy issues which might, awarely or unawarely, interfere with the counselling process. I believe supervision

will be a valuable and essential resource to me as long as I practise as a counsellor.

As well as the 'bread and butter' of training, supervision and therapy, my experience has been rounded by participation in all sorts of activities at Stockton. There is a full programme of therapy and training workshops focusing on particular themes. Following personal interests I have attended workshops on Food and Nurturance, Relating and Bodyscripts, to name a few. One highlight was to go to a five-day residential workshop in the South of France exploring Addiction, Creativity and Transformation. More than this, Stockton exists as a social community. Events such as Christmas and New Year parties, summer picnics and so on create a place where we can include families and loved ones if we choose to, so that learning and personal change need not exist in a vacuum separate from our daily lives.

I have found that Stockton, with all its many facets, has, to use Bowlby's phrase, provided me with a 'secure base'. In my process of change and development I have found that my trainers, therapist, supervisors and fellow trainees have given me appropriate support and challenge to involve myself in the wider community — setting up a counselling placement, attending conferences, networking with colleagues in my own city and so on. A developing sense of connectedness and autonomy is beginning to replace my feelings of isolation and dependence.

At the same time I have also felt fully included in the growth and development of the Institute. The directors have taken great care to ensure that the success of the Institute does not rely purely on their input and presence. While taking full

responsibility for guiding the process, they have worked to devolve power appropriately, so that the Institute itself will become autonomous. For me this has meant I have had many opportunities to give as well as to receive. I was invited to be a member of one of the committees at Stockton, working with a small group taking responsibility for the promotion and development of the Institute. This has given me the opportunity to use my skills, and to experience another kind of contact with people, working together on a task.

Another sense in which I have felt deeply involved with the development of the Institute has been around course recognition. I was one of the intake of students that experienced the process of having our course officially recognised by the British Association for Counselling. As our trainer steered us through the recognition procedure, we were fully involved and consulted as decisions about course content and structure were made and refined. I found that the process reflected the style of the course in being truly student-centred, and when assessors from the BAC Courses Recognition Group came to visit us it was clear that we regarded the training as being 'our course' — a product of all our work together.

A highlight of my training was actually taking my examination. I and several other candidates formed an Exam Preparation and Case Study group. We met with a supervisor over several months, as we all made ready to take our Diploma exam. The exam process at Stockton is a great challenge and also a source of much

learning and enjoyment. As a candidate I had the opportunity to show my skills and abilities, share my insights and my interests, and celebrate my learning with peers, friends, trainers and others who have shared in my journey.

Since passing my Diploma, I have been continuing my personal and professional development, and considering the various options available at Stockton for further training. I have elected to do the Diploma in Humanistic Psychotherapy specialising in Gestalt, and I am enjoying the excitement and flexibility of being able to plan my training to suit my own particular interests and needs.

Increasingly, the Gestalt principle that the whole is more than the sum of its parts is apparent to me when I consider my experience of coming to train at Stockton. It is easy enough to name all the individual threads of my experience, but hard indeed to find a way fully to communicate their subtle interrelatedness. Training, supervision, therapy, the highlights of particular workshops, social activities, administrative involvement, all touch each other, find reflection and meaning in each other, support each other, and in time become integrated.

I am very much in the middle of this process, and I see around me at Stockton people who are further on, and people who are just beginning. I find that I have become part of a supportive, challenging and loving community, and the creative variety of patterns we are weaving, individually and together, is astonishing and deeply inspiring.