

## Interview with Bozena Merrick

Vivienne Silver-Leigh

**Terapia, a new training course in integrative child psychotherapy, is the brain child of Bozena Merrick, who shared with Vivienne Silver-Leigh why she set it up, how it is progressing and her vision of its future development.**

**Bozena, like others fleeing from the Communist regime of the 80's, came to the UK from Poland, in 1985. Her qualifications as a trained psychologist were not recognised, so she spent eight years at the Centre for Counselling and Psychotherapy Education, gaining UKCP and BACP qualifications and advanced diplomas, with a transpersonal and humanistic orientation.**

**Vivienne:** What is the connection between your work with the Project for Children with Special Needs, and your setting up the new training course which you have called Terapia?

**Bozena:** I first realised when I was working in Richmond that there is an incredible gap - a dramatic need for therapeutic help for children. I created two services there, one for parents of children with special needs, and a second service for the children with special needs, which was supported by the National Lottery (now the Community Fund.) The latter was extended to include short term behavioural and emotional problems of siblings of the children with special needs.

I was asked to develop this work in Richmond, in 1996, to provide a service for parents, professionals, and children and families.

The service for adults ran very smoothly and successfully, but the service for children never did. My problem was that I simply could not find appropriately trained and skilled child counsellors or psychotherapists able to come and do the work. I had far more urgent and desperate referrals to the children's service from local professionals - head teachers, social workers, health visitors, as well as all the children needing help, and I ran the only service in the Borough of Richmond at that time. I could not meet the need.

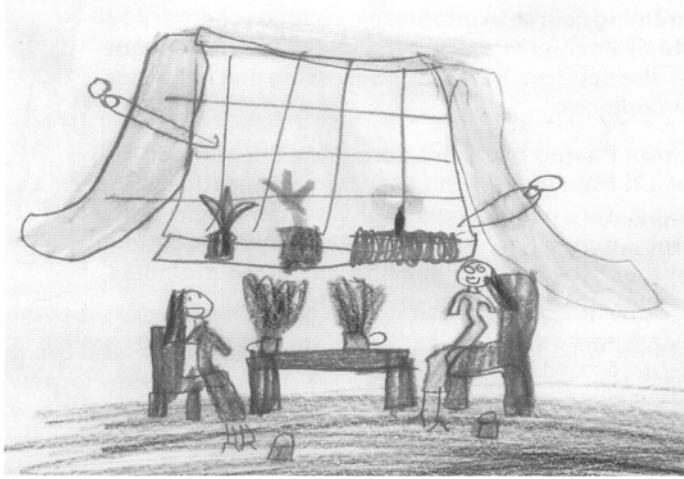
There are hardly any trainings from which I could draw students on placements as volunteers. There were not enough local private child psychotherapists, and there is a waiting list for NHS counsellors and psychotherapists of two years. Children were left without any therapy.

**Vivienne:** So this led you to set up your own training course. How long did it take you to get started?

**Vivienne:** I understand that you set up your training course in child psychotherapy and counselling because you wanted a new approach to therapy for children.

**Bozena:** Yes, we are trying to put an integrative child therapy training on the map.

**Vivienne:** And you are acknowledging what analytical training has done so far, and intend to include infant



**Bozena:** It took me over a year. I found tremendous support from some psychotherapists, psychiatrists, and counsellors who work with children, and are now on the staff. I talked to a lot of people, who shared my vision and my passion for the whole thing. I met with enthusiasm and support and that has been very exciting.

It is a five year journey for the students, and I must have been enthusiastic enough to attract the first group of students who have already started on the course.

*observation, with underpinning with an analytical approach but also including humanistic or Rogerian ways of working with children, transpersonal, cognitive and behavioural modules.*

**Bozena:** The analytical approach, attachment theory and infant observation are the integral part of our training. We include Humanistic and Transpersonal ways of working with children and a systemic approach is taken to the work with families. Cognitive and Behavioural approaches will also be relevant to adolescents

who respond well to that way of working. The theoretical training is in parallel with the experiential training, as students will be offered placements at the Counselling Service for the Project for Children with Special Needs in Richmond.

I want to emphasise that our training is integrative of all the different theories about children – using different tools, music, movement, art, play therapy and sand play. We also include a lot of clinical knowledge, child psychiatry, neuropsychiatry. We have clinicians from Guys Hospital and Kings Hospital who come in and do these modules. We invite other professionals to teach specialist subjects like Child Protection issues.

**Vivienne:** Are you going to link up with any other organisations?

**Bozena:** I hope that we will link with local schools and family centres, and that we will become a place to get advice and service for children, and additional training for local authority services.

**Vivienne:** What else does your vision include?

**Bozena:** I hope to set up a charity in North London, for a centre for low cost therapy for children and adolescents, for local authority and

statutory services, and private families, to give comprehensive help. I am in the process of lodging papers with the Charity Commission.

There is now a new Ministry for Children, which shows that changes in child provision are desperately needed, so I am very hopeful that we will get interest from this quarter. Current statistics about child mental health are that one million children in the UK suffer from a mental health problem, and many experience sexual abuse, bullying, physical abuse and parental divorce.

We as adults take it for granted that we are going to talk about our childhood when we go for therapy, so therefore it seems to me obvious that help should be available at the very time it is needed, in childhood. Often it is not. Therapeutic help for children is still rare, costly or even unobtainable. There is a shortage of trained psychotherapists and counsellors able to work in this specialised area with a variety of therapeutic approaches. They should be available as a resource in every school, social work team, residential home or family centre, as well as for parents who want to pay for help.

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