

# Using play therapy to improve development and wellbeing

Play therapy is used to identify, respond and support the developmental and mental health needs of children. **Monika Jephcott**, chief executive and clinical director of Play Therapy UK details her journey and what needs to be done to shine a light on children's mental health.



**T**oday there are many different forms of therapy that aim to improve the mental wellbeing of children. Play Therapy UK (PTUK) was established in October 2000. It's main activities include:

- Managing the Register of Play and Creative Arts Therapists which is accredited by the Professional Standards Authority.
- Quality assuring its registrants through a stringent revalidation process and managing standards of clinical supervision.
- Accrediting training courses for the initial training required to meet the standards of the register and for continuous professional training (CPD).
- Extending clinical evidence base to improve the quality of registrants' practice and to demonstrate the effectiveness of play.
- Providing a range of services to support the career development of our registrants.

Monika Jephcott has decades of experience working and managing professional organisations and was a founding member of Play Therapy UK in 1998. PTUK has now grown and is the largest Play Therapy professional organisation in the UK. In 2002, Jephcott was elected as president of Play Therapy International (PTI) which is responsible for overseeing and implementing the standards required for safe practice beyond the UK.

Speaking about how her journey started, Monika stated:

'For me, it all started when I began teaching in secondary schools about 40 years ago. I had discovered that a lot of children weren't meeting their own potential. Now this was because their emotional and mental wellbeing wasn't being addressed. I tried to intervene and do something about it but, in the end, it became more difficult because of conflict of

interest. If children came to me with a problem, as a teacher, I had to report it but as a therapist I would be able to deal with problem and come to best decision for the child. So, I decided to become a councillor and completed a diploma course.'

**BR:** How did you proceed from there?

**MJ:** 'I still needed to explore and took a more creative course that studied the area a little more holistically. After that I had a reasonable toolkit and went to a continental school which opened at 8am and finished at 3pm. There was a large secondary school and I had my private practice from 5pm to 10pm. I did that for around 10 years and it taught me a lot.

'My goal was to help children in ways that they hadn't been support before. I did several more therapy courses and designed the course that we have at the moment which is not therapy through speech because

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most children cannot always express their reasonings and thought by talking. Our design focuses more on creative arts and play. We place our therapeutic tools in creative spaces to help children express their thoughts. They have toys to play with and our therapists will sit in and reflect verbally through the session.

'To expand our reach, I was introduced to a consultant at BT called Jeff Thomas. We met and he joined and helped me to create this organisation which is now worldwide. When we started teaching the course, I was determined that we wouldn't teach anything that wasn't accredited.

'In 2001, the founder of Play Therapy International, Dr Mark Barnes was holding the first international Play Therapy conference in Dublin. We met and spoke to him there and we asked if they can accredit our course, Within two days he agreed and the teaching took off.'

**BR:** An incredible journey and you also petition to the Government for more support. Why is the Children's Mental Health Charter Campaign so important?

**MJ:** 'We always knew that we needed to have competencies and be able to show evidence for our work.

We have other 400,000 session sheets which tell us what methods are being used. Supporting the Children's Mental Health Charter enabled us to show our evidence and provide actionable directions.

'The more I have been involved in the political side of it the more I have been shocked. The Mental Health Charter from 1983 has seen very little progression. It has barely been amended and children are not prioritised enough.

'We decided, as professionals, we could not be responsible in not doing something for children's mental health. Therefore, we thought the best way of campaigning for that would be to have a charter, so we joined the All Parliamentary Group.'

### Training

At PTUK, the training covers a variety of difference courses for therapeutic play and play therapy training accredited by Play Therapy UK (PTUK).

Play Therapy is rapidly growing in popularity across the world but Monika highlighted that there is shortage in those being properly trained. APAC, which is a sister organisation of PTUK delivers free training to allow more people to become certified as trainers and course directors.

Currently, the range of courses,

for which Course Directors are required is:

- One-day Introductory Events
- Post Graduate Certificate in Therapeutic Play Skills
- Certificate in Filial Play Coaching/ Mentoring
- Post Graduate Diploma in Play Therapy

The courses go from the basic introductory courses all the way to completing diplomas and an MA. Anyone that is interested in using play therapy in their work can access these courses and choose the right path for them. Many settings across the UK now integrate play therapy into their learning and development models.

Summing up, Monika concluded:

'This year we want to see as many children as possible get the services they need when they need them. I believe that children are very capable of expressing their views if given the right environment to do so. At Play Therapy UK we aim to reach as many as we can and train more people through our organization.' ■

● W: <https://playtherapy.org.uk>