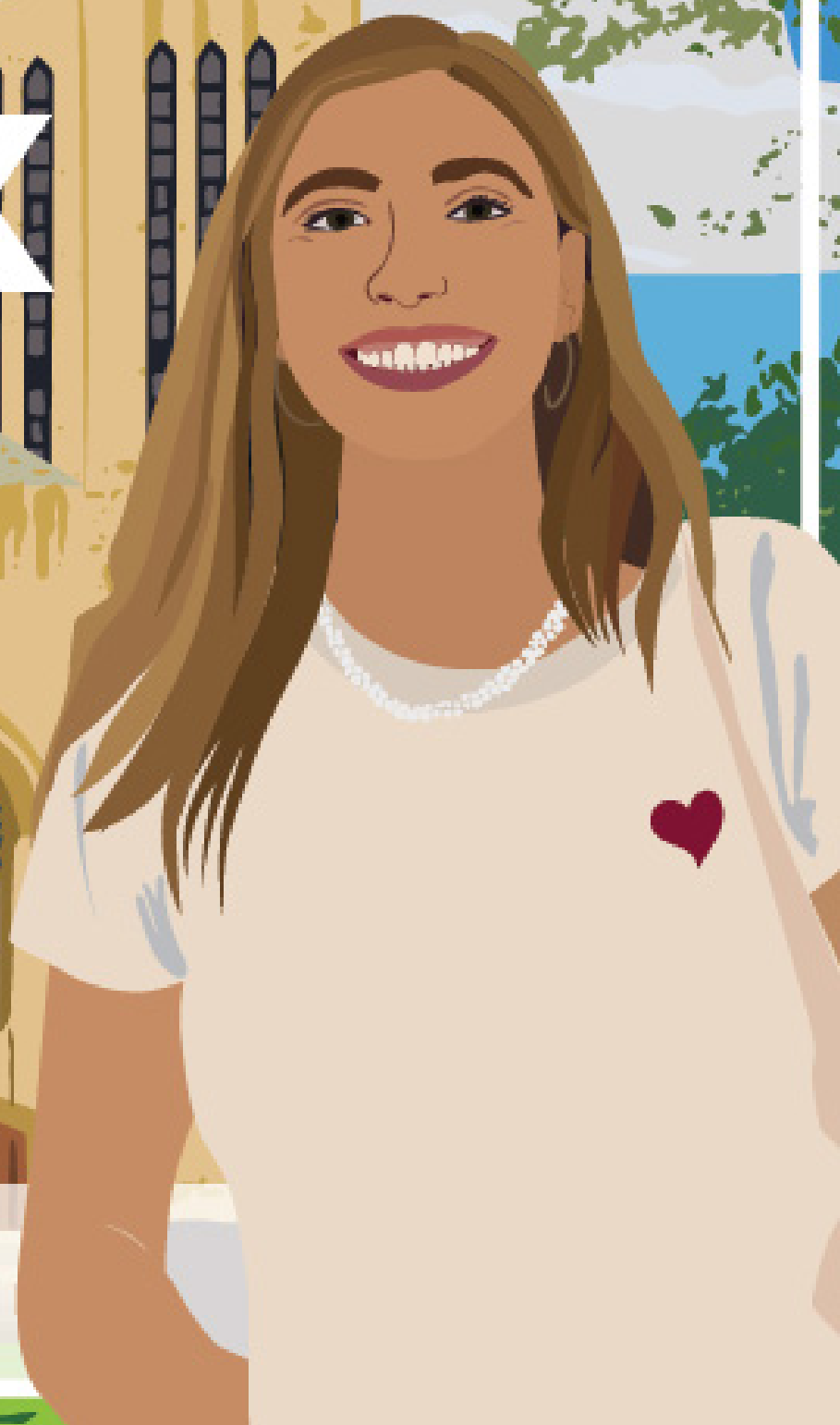


# Outside The Box

Alumni Magazine  
Summer 2023



**Anna Freud**  
National Centre for  
Children and Families

# Editorial

We are very excited to welcome you to this year's first edition of our alumni magazine 'Outside the Box'. We hope that 2023 has started well for you and that after a long winter, spring brings a renewed sense of vigour and hope! In this issue, we are focusing on the importance of international collaborations in the field of child mental health. As we all know, sharing diverse experiences and viewpoints increases the depth, value and application of our work.

Turn to page 12 to hear from Dr Helena Rutherford and Paula Lopez Ramos about the MRes in Developmental Neuroscience and Psychopathology (DNP). Dr Rutherford is a Deputy Programme Director on this course which is run jointly by the Anna Freud Centre (AFC)/UCL and Yale. It is a perfect example of cross-border cooperation and recent graduate Paula recounts what she has gained academically and personally by undertaking this course. Dr Rutherford and Paula also share wonderful insights into their experiences of living in a different country.

In your time at the AFC, you may have been taught by a pivotal figure in the Postgraduate Studies team, Dr Fiona John. In recognition of her outstanding contribution to the AFC, Dr John was recently awarded a prestigious UCL Arena Senior Fellowship. Read about her journey on page 7 and the process involved in applying for one of these awards. Congratulations Fiona!

A new feature that we have introduced in this issue is a section entitled 'Book Corner' (page 22) where a professional tells us about a book that has had a profound impact on them. We start with Dr Vanessa Puetz and her chosen book is 'Far from the Tree: Parents, Children and the Search for Identity' by Andrew Solomon. If you would like to share a book that has been formative for you, please email us at [alumni@annafreud.org](mailto:alumni@annafreud.org).

Tempted to return to education? Take a look at the scholarships and bursaries available on page 10 as you may be eligible for funding support.

There is so much more and we hope you enjoy reading this edition and [welcome your feedback and any suggestions](#) you may have for future issues.

Please do keep connected!

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# Welcome

As alumni of the Anna Freud's postgraduate programmes in child mental health, you are well aware of the critical role that mental health plays in the overall wellbeing of children and their families. This is especially true in today's rapidly changing and interconnected world, where children are facing new challenges and stressors that require innovative and effective solutions. In line with this new interconnectedness across the globe, we are proud and excited to be launching our first postgraduate offer that is fully remote. The Postgraduate Diploma (PG Dip) in Child and Adolescent Mental Health and Neuroscience and Practice which I will spearhead, will champion a new way of learning together amongst practitioners from all over the world. It will be an opportunity to share with and inspire each other with their experiences of helping children and families in their respective contexts and geographical locations. For more information about this new course, turn to page 24.

International collaborations allow us to share ideas, resources, and expertise in a way that expands our knowledge and strengthens our impact. By working together with colleagues and institutions around the world, we can develop a more comprehensive understanding of the issues children and their families face, and more effectively address their needs.

At the Anna Freud Centre, we are committed to building a diverse and inclusive community of professionals who are dedicated to improving the lives of children and their families. Our alumni network is a vital part of this community, and your experiences, perspectives, and contributions are essential to our ongoing success.

I encourage you to engage with us and with each other through our alumni network, and to continue to support the important work that we

do here at the centre. By working together, we can ensure that children everywhere have access to the care and support that they need to thrive.

Warm wishes,

Vanessa  
Anna Freud Centre Alumni Coordinator

Dr Vanessa Puetz



In addition to her role as Alumni Coordinator, Dr Vanessa Puetz is Deputy Director of the UCL-Yale MRes in Developmental Neuroscience and Psychopathology (DNP), Senior Course Tutor in Postgraduate Studies and a UCL Associate Professor. Vanessa's contribution to education has been recognised through a number of teaching award nominations, as well as being honoured with the UCL Provost's Education Award 2019 and the UCL Education Award 2019. Vanessa was awarded these for her extraordinary commitment to students, who rated her amongst the best lecturers in the UCL Faculty of Brain Sciences.





# Alumni Achievements

In this section we celebrate your successes! If you have an achievement that you would like to share with your fellow alumni, or if you are an AFC staff member with some positive news about your students – past or present – please do let us know by emailing [alumni@annafreud.org](mailto:alumni@annafreud.org).

In this issue, the spotlight falls on the MSc in Developmental Psychology and Clinical Practice (DPCP). This two-year full-time programme aims to provide a framework for developing an integrated understanding of child development and a range of childhood disorders, and to give students an opportunity to apply this understanding in a clinical setting, through a supervised placement in the second year within a mental health service.

## Alumni career presentations at DPCP skills workshop

On 11 January, the AFC ran a professional skills careers workshop for students on the DPCP course. It was a hybrid event with some 40 people attending in person and several others joining online. Both first and second-year students attended the two-hour course at the Centre along with some staff. The impetus for the event was triggered by speaking to current students who requested more information to help them think about their careers. Alumni from the course were invited to speak at the event; they talked about the careers they had pursued after completing the course and how their time at the AFC undertaking the DPCP was helping them in

their chosen professions.

Of the 11 alumni who presented, 8 attended in person, 2 people sent videos and 1 sent a blog. Students on the DPCP course come from internationally diverse backgrounds and the alumni reflected this too, making the experiences they shared more enriching. In terms of careers, the alumni had gone on to pursue a broad range of career avenues, such as clinical psychology, child psychotherapy, medical training as well as consultancy work relating to mental health. In fact, two of the alumni are now staff members at the AFC: Rachel Ransley, a Clinical Psychologist is an Associate Clinical Tutor and Module Lead; Hannah Ryan – also a Clinical Psychologist – is a Module Lead in Clinical Practice.

Some of the common elements from the DPCP course that the alumni expressed they found very useful and relevant were:

- The roleplay and clinical skills.
- The in-depth research skills.
- Being able to think clinically from multiple perspectives.

Feedback from the current cohort of students about the skills workshop was very positive and they found hearing from the alumni about their journeys, not solely helpful in terms of information, but also extremely inspirational.

Thank you to all those who attended, in particular the alumni who gave their time to share their experiences and made the workshop so insightful.



Photo of Catherine Lenain

## Catherine Lenain

After completing my MSc in DPCP with the AFC and UCL, I felt inspired to go on to the doctoral training in Child and Adolescent Psychotherapy with the British Psychotherapy Foundation, AFC and UCL. Having already learned about the work of the AFC Early Years Parenting Unit (EYPU) during my MSc, then beginning to work more with children and families involved in the child protection system as a doctoral trainee, I was delighted when the opportunity arose to conduct my doctoral research on the interview data of parents who had participated in the EYPU intervention. I was particularly interested in the perspectives and experiences of parenting of mothers with complex trauma who were at risk of having their child removed from their care. I felt that learning more about these mothers' 'parenting representations' may be importantly informative for our understanding of the pathways of transgenerational trauma, and how best to approach interventions with this population. I was struck by how little qualitative research there was in this area, which meant that these parents' voices and emotional experiences were often lost amidst a focus on identifying risk to the child. This seemed a particular challenge, given that these mothers' experiences of being stigmatised and blamed significantly contribute to their struggles to engage with help. I therefore decided to conduct a thematic analysis of the pre-intervention Parent Development Interview transcripts of a small sample of mothers who had participated in the EYPU, seeking to qualitatively explore their parenting representations and experiences. I was supervised by Billie Lever Taylor, who now works for KCL, and a condensed and revised version of this empirical paper has just been published in the Journal of Child and



Family Social Work:

<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/cfs.12987>

I am currently working full-time in the NHS in Greenwich CAMHS, in a Looked After Children/ Edge of Care Team and Early Intervention in Schools Consultation Team. I also teach Infant Observation seminars for the BPF/Birkbeck MSc in Psychodynamics of Human Development. My research has been immensely informative for my clinical practice, particularly in the way I engage with parents with a history of complex trauma and the network around them. At the heart of my work, there is now always the awareness that building relational trust and supporting the development of epistemic trust, is foundational to any effective intervention with this population.

While I plan to focus primarily on my clinical work and teaching and take a break from research for now, I hope to engage further with research in this field in good time. I greatly enjoyed working with Billie on this project and we have discussed possible ideas for future studies in this field when I return to research.

# MIND THE GAP

There will always be GAPS between us and our clients  
and our responsibility to be mindful of them

## ChangeMaker's project

Emilie Hess and Helin Ozturk are two of our current second-year students on the Msc in Developmental Psychology and Clinical Practice course. They have embarked on an exciting UCL ChangeMaker's project directed at AFC staff and students. As part of that, they will be running an Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) workshop that investigates how to meaningfully incorporate Social Graces into psychological research and practice. They have organised an interesting panel of five speakers who identify with different Social Graces in order to learn from their lived experiences.

ChangeMakers is a UCL project funding grant that aims to help students and staff work together collaboratively.

Emilie Hess explained: "Due to the nature of the psychology field, we face sensitive issues from a diverse range of people. Thus, a sensitive understanding of the impact of Social Graces and EDI is necessary, crucially taught by people within those populations. We decided to create a workshop that was centred around learning from people with lived experience of Social Graces that do not hold the power and privilege in order to gather a better understanding of their needs.

'Social Graces' is a concept created by John Burnham. It investigates qualities of people in terms of power and privilege. Examples of Social



ChangeMaker's Project poster

Graces include sexuality, race and ethnicity, immigration, ability, religion and so on. Our workshop has five speakers who will speak on ability, sexuality, immigration, religion, race and ethnicity.

Our five panelists with lived experience will work to explore the impact of social graces, with an emphasis on mental health. This is the crux of the project and emphasises the importance of giving individuals with less power and privilege a space to inform us as practitioners and researchers."

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# AFC News

## Dr Fiona John awarded a UCL Arena Senior Fellowship

Many of our alumni from the Developmental Psychology and Clinical Practice Masters' programme will have been taught by Dr Fiona John, a former tutor on this course and longstanding member of the Postgraduate Studies team at the Anna Freud Centre. Fiona was recently awarded a UCL Arena Senior Fellowship (SFHEA), a well-deserved award that gives formal recognition to the leadership, significant impact, and valuable contribution made by Fiona to the AFC.

### What is the award?

UCL Arena is UCL's education unit who develop learning and teaching practices across the institution. A major part of their work is to award Arena fellowships to teaching and support staff, a scheme of internationally recognised awards accredited by Advance HE (Formerly the Higher Education Academy: HEA).

All UCL staff who teach, supervise, assess or support students' learning may be able to gain this recognition for their work. These awards cater for staff in a wide range of roles and at different stages in their university teaching career, including: postgraduate teaching assistants and lecturers on probation; programme leaders; senior staff with strategic roles; and professional services staff who support teaching.

We spoke to Fiona about her motivation to apply, the process involved and the benefits conferred from the Fellowship.

### Please briefly describe your previous experience and your current role?

I am a Clinical Psychologist by training and currently an Associate Clinical Tutor and Module Lead on the MSC in Developmental Psychology and Clinical Practice. I first started working at the Centre in 2010, as a Clinical Tutor for the UCL PG Diplomas in Low Intensity CBT Interventions, as well as for the PG Diploma in CBT for Children and Young People. In 2011, I joined Professor Nick Midgley as a Clinical Tutor in the founding year of the MSC in Developmental Psychology and Clinical Practice. I have held roles as both Deputy and Programme Director for this Master's Programme and it is a pleasure to remain part of the teaching and clinical tutor team today.

### How did you come to know about the UCL Arena Fellowship and what motivated you to apply for it?

I have known about the UCL Arena Fellowship for many years, through colleagues who had submitted applications. Having trained as a Clinical Psychologist, the move across to academia enabled me to develop new knowledge and experiences in Higher Education pedagogical practice, particularly within the area of clinical skills, such as building therapeutic relationships, assessment and formulation practice. The HEA Senior Fellowship provided me with an opportunity to reflect on my formative experiences within Higher Education (HE) over the last twelve years and take stock of my own development and commitment to postgraduate teaching and tutoring, as well as leadership experiences at UCL and the Anna Freud Centre.

### What did the application process involve?

The HEA Category Tool helped me decide what level of Fellow to apply for. I used the criteria on the UK Professional Standards Framework to ensure I provided evidence for each category. UCL Arena provided some helpful sessions on 'initial guidance' and 'developing your application', and it was great to meet other UCL staff also setting out on their Fellowship applications. The application involves



completing a continuing professional development log, a reflective account on educational leadership and three case studies evidencing experience in the UK Professional Standards criteria, focusing on leadership, mentoring and coordination of HE activities. The UCL Arena put me in touch with a mentor and we enjoyed lively discussions on my case-study examples. The process did take me a few months, chipping away in my spare time. I enjoyed writing it and looking back at evidence and examples of my pedagogical practice. I appreciated the encouragement from my two referees, Professor Nick Midgley and Associate Professor Vanessa Puetz, who were both so generous with their support.

#### What have you gained from doing it?

The application process became a much more valuable experience than I had expected, enabling me to reflect on the many ways I have learnt to support students and staff within their learning, teaching and tutoring journeys. It gave me permission to consider the values and experiences I have brought to the co-founding, leading, teaching and tutoring of the DPCP programme, as well as experiences in leadership from my years as a Consultant Clinical Psychologist in NHS CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services) and from my five-year post as an External Examiner for University of Edinburgh. Through completing the application, I remembered the values Nick and I held when writing the curriculum: to provide postgraduate students with an academic deepening of their understanding of child development and mental health; as well as safe spaces within the programme to discuss the impact of inequalities

on children's and families mental health; learn and practice clinical skills; discuss the complexities of theory practice links; and embrace the reflective practice journey throughout the two-year Master's journey. The draft of the CAMHS Core Competency Framework (Calder, Roth and Pilling, 2012) had just been released when we set up the programme

Photo of zDr Fiona John



and remains a guiding document for teaching and placement. Reviewing the development of the programme certainly shone a light on the time and commitment that myself and programme staff – past and present – have dedicated to the academic UCL Master’s programme, in terms of development of teaching resources, videoed role play examples, placement monitoring and tutoring systems and integrating work skills experiences and research. I have enjoyed devising assignments using a Problem-Based Learning approach to assess skills used in clinical workplace scenarios and supporting staff in linking assessments to teaching objectives. In setting up the programme 12 years ago, I remember visiting many London CAMHS to develop the programme’s placements and we now have many long-standing working relationships with CAMHS services and clinicians across London. Indeed, it has been a testimony to the professionalism and hard work of our postgraduate students on placement that NHS CAMHS services now approach the programme requesting placement students. In writing the application I was also able to consider the programme changes and student support to Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT) during the onset of the pandemic, what we learnt and how the programme developed from these unusual and testing circumstances.

### How has it impacted the way you teach now?

The application process has not only enabled me to take stock but has also allowed me to focus on areas I have been developing in recent years and that I will be further developing. For example, I have incorporated Burnham’s (2012) Social Graces model<sup>1</sup> into a reflective practice model by Lavender<sup>2</sup> (2003). This enables students and indeed staff to draw upon a framework to explore 15 areas of social difference, with each social grace holding equal importance (Nolte, 2017)<sup>3</sup>. Each student’s lived experience thus brings its own learning and value into the teaching session. I have also had time to read and reflect more on compassion-focused leadership and student-centred experiences of postgraduate learning.

### Would you recommend the Arena Fellowship to your colleagues? Please explain your answer.

Absolutely! It does take time and commitment to write the application, however it has been a very affirming process. It is helpful in creating space to reflect and validate the knowledge and skills you have under your belt, and the values which lie at the core of one’s teaching, tutoring, mentoring and leadership. I would say I am even more committed to compassion-focused leadership and student experience after reflecting and writing on these experiences.

Even if you are not sure if fellowship is for you, please take a look. It can really help you reflect on your practices, as well as demonstrating to you and others how much your contribution is valued. If you are considering applying for a fellowship, you can get more information here <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/teaching-learning/professional-development/ucl-arena-fellowships>

Arena staff can support you in a number of ways with the process, including providing online resources, offering developmental workshops and providing mentors for those near the end of the written application process.

The next Fellowship deadlines are Monday 27 March 2023 and Monday 12 June 2023.

### References

<sup>1</sup>Burnham, J. (2012). Developments in social GRRRAACCEEESSS: Visible-invisible and voiced-unvoiced. In I. B. Krause (Ed.), *Culture and reflexivity in systemic psychotherapy: Mutual perspectives* (pp139–160). Karnac Books.

<sup>2</sup>Lavender, T. (2003). Redressing the balance: The place, history and future of reflective practice in clinical training. *Clinical Psychology*, 27 ( pp11–15).

<sup>3</sup>Nolte, L. (June 2017). (Dis)gracefully navigating the challenges of diversity learning and teaching – reflections on the Social Graces as a diversity training tool, *Context* 151, pp4-6.



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## Postgraduate bursaries and scholarships

Did you know that as an alum, you could be eligible for a bursary or scholarship on a UCL postgraduate programme at the AFC?

The Centre recognises that training in the field of child mental health is expensive and takes time which can deter potential applicants. It is also conscious that advances in the field are inhibited because professionals do not reflect the diversity of the population. To address these issues and in line with its EDI (Equity, Diversity and Inclusion) policy, the Centre offers a number of bursaries and scholarships to its most promising candidates, current students as well as alumni.

### Masters Bursaries - Academic Research

These bursaries are available to students embarking on either one of the Masters programmes: Developmental Neuroscience and Psychopathology MRes or Early Child Development and Clinical Applications MSc.

### Dr Alex Holder Scholarship – MSc in Developmental Psychology and Clinical Practice

This Scholarship has been established to commemorate the significant contribution Dr Alex Holder (1931-2018) made to the field of psychology and aims to support others to follow in his footsteps. Alex trained at the AFC, where he worked for almost 30 years helping children and families. One scholarship – which covers full tuition fees plus 50% of estimated living costs (over a two-year period) – is available for a student on this course.

### Future in Mind Scholarship for Black UK Students

This scholarship was established in recognition of the lack of diversity in research and clinical practice in child mental health which limits the potential to drive advances. British candidates of African and Caribbean descent in particular are currently under-represented in this field. One scholarship with a value of £4,500 (total of £9,000 over a two-year period) is available for a student on one of the following Masters programmes: Developmental Neuroscience and Psychopathology MRes; Developmental Psychology and Clinical Practice MSc; and Early Child Development and Clinical Applications MSc.

### Asquith Mature Student Bursary

This bursary is aimed at supporting candidates undertaking further studies at a later stage in life, or who are seeking to return to study after some time. One bursary with a value of £4,500 per year of study (total of £9,000 over a two-year period) is available for a student on one of the following Masters programmes: Developmental Neuroscience and Psychopathology MRes; Developmental Psychology and Clinical Practice MSc; and Early Child Development and Clinical Applications MSc.

### Chesser Bursary

The Chesser Bursary is available to current students and alumni of the MSc Early Child Development and Clinical Applications, or alumni of the MSc Psychoanalytic Developmental Psychology. Applicants must be interested in pursuing a future career in child psychotherapy. The value will be agreed by the panel but is normally no more than £3,000 per academic year and will be based on both academic merit and financial need. Applicants must be permanent residents in the UK although current students or recent alumni that are able to demonstrate they are actively pursuing a career in child psychotherapy, whilst residing in the UK may also be eligible.



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### The Barbara Throckmorton Drinka Scholarship

This scholarship has been established in memory of Barbara Ann Throckmorton Drinka (1943-2020), a practising psychoanalyst and psychotherapist. She completed advanced training in psychoanalysis in 2006 at Oregon Psychoanalytic Center and was the first graduate of the Center to become nationally certified in psychoanalysis. The value of this scholarship is £2,250 per year of study (total of £4,500 over a two-year period). It is available to applicants on the MSc in Early Child Development and Clinical Applications. Applicants should be permanent UK residents and eligibility is based on both academic merit and financial need. Priority is for students from minoritised groups and at least half of all recipients of the scholarship

will be individuals who identify as female. You can find out more about all the postgraduate bursaries and scholarships here:<https://www.annafreud.org/ucl-postgraduate-study/scholarships/>



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# Alumni stories: MRes in Developmental Neuroscience and Psychopathology (DNP)

Ever wondered what it is like to be a student within the prestigious four walls of a US Ivy League university? If you answered yes, read on for a sneak peak into life at one of these revered institutions as we hear from recent Yale graduate, Paula Lopez Ramos. Before that, Dr Helena Rutherford tells us about her experiences of moving ‘across the pond’ to work at Yale. Paula recently completed her MRes in Developmental Neuroscience and Psychopathology (DNP), a course for which Dr Rutherford is one of two Deputy Programme Directors.

## What does the course entail?

For this MRes, the first year is based at UCL and the second year at Yale University, New Haven in the US. The focus of this programme is on understanding the emergence of developmental psychopathology from multiple perspectives, drawing on neurobiological, cognitive, developmental, clinical and psychoanalytic perspectives. A substantial research project is completed in the second year at Yale. Over half of students typically progress to further their research skills, either as research assistants or to PhD programmes. The remainder either pursue further clinical training or work. A minority decide to pursue a career outside of psychology.



## Dr Helena Rutherford

### 1. Please briefly summarise your academic and professional background?

I am an Associate Professor at Yale and Deputy Programme Director for the Developmental Neuroscience and Psychopathology (DNP) MRes. My research background is in experimental psychology and neuroscience; and I direct the Before and After Baby Lab at Yale, where we examine how the mind and brain change during the perinatal period.

### 2. What led you to your current role at Yale?

I came to Yale to be the Course Tutor for the DNP programme and to complete postdoctoral training in EEG/ERP\* under the mentorship of Linda Mayes. It was really important to me to have a neuroscience-focused postdoc that would allow me to develop as a teacher and mentor. I arrived late in 2008 thinking I would only be at Yale for two years...

### 3. It's been 14 instead of the intended 2 years! What changed?

When that two-year endpoint started to close in, I definitely was not ready to leave DNP and Yale, and so the visa extensions began! Two years later, whilst I was watching my beloved Chelsea FC playing in the Champions League final (which we won), I met my now husband. We are now homeowners and welcomed our daughter Amelia in 2020. When I look back to my past self – arriving in New Haven with only two suitcases and a carry-on – I hadn't anticipated that the US would be my second home.



### 4. As a Brit abroad, what things do you find noticeably American?

It constantly amazes me how accessible everything is here; there are drive-throughs for everything – from fast food to banking services. So much is also open 24 hours that you don't have to worry about getting somewhere before it closes!

### 5. What, if anything, do you miss about the UK?

Aside from continually missing my family and friends, I miss the British countryside, ancient history on my doorstep, and of course the pubs! It's also very hard to source a sausage roll here...

\*An electroencephalogram (EEG) is a recording of brain activity. An event-related potential (ERP) is the measured brain response that is the direct result of a specific sensory, cognitive, or motor event.



## 6. How do you find working at an Ivy League University?

Yale has been my first experience of working at an American-based university, so it's hard for me to compare beyond stories I hear from other universities. There is definitely 'brand recognition' that comes with the Yale name though!

## 7. Any highlights / memorable moments that you would like to share?

There have been so many! We have had some very entertaining end of course dinners... and it has been wonderful to celebrate non-academic events in our students lives, including engagements, weddings, and births (during the course as well as after!).

## 8. Has the course structure and/or delivery changed since you have been there?

We have had some noticeable changes over the years. The course title changed, and we transitioned from MSc to MRes. The students originally took many more classes at Yale, but this has been streamlined in recent years to ensure a more fuller

research experience. What is most noticeable about the changes within our programme is that they are often student-led; I really appreciate the flexibility to be able to change components of the programme based on student feedback. We would not be the successful programme we are today without that.

## 9. Would you say teaching styles are different at Yale in contrast to AFC/UCL? If so, in what ways?

Given the formative assessments for the second year of DNP are focused on research, it gives me a lot more flexibility in terms of the content of lectures and seminars. In particular, I really enjoy being able to invite members of the Yale community to speak with the students, sharing their diverse experiences in research and clinical work and that I can vary those speakers every year. I also arrange additional seminars for the students when I come across other faculty that are engaged with exciting and DNP-relevant work. This flexibility also means I can change my lecture content to be timely; I recently overhauled a neuroscience lecture with a few days' notice to focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion in neuroscience research methods. I felt it was important for students to be aware of recent national and international efforts on this topic.

Photo of a seminar at Yale



## 10. In your experience, how do you see the students change and develop during the course of the year?

I think the second year is particularly transformative; the opportunity for students to immerse themselves in research for a year can provide incredible interpersonal and professional growth. At the end of each year, I take time to reflect on where each student started in September and how they cross the finish line in June. Working alongside the students throughout the year is one of the joys and honours of my position.

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### 11. What would you say are the most important skills that students gain from undertaking this course?

Across the two years of the course, students learn how to apply different theoretical perspectives to shape and advance our understanding of research questions and clinical disorders. They also learn to critique research and consider the role of development as being fundamental to our understanding of psychopathology. The yearlong research experience also fosters independence and mastery.

### 12. Why do you think people should consider embarking upon the course?

There are few masters courses in the world that prioritise an immersive and tailored research experience. The course has been critical for so many students in their pathways to further education and training, providing skills and opportunities uniquely offered through activities at UCL and Yale. The interpersonal growth of being at Yale and taking ownership of a research project from start to finish, often incorporating cutting-edge techniques, is one that is hard to beat!

### 13. What are your personal aspirations for the future?

I'm really excited to continue to grow DNP at Yale and enhance the student experience. We have now introduced a PhD programme inspired by the MRes, and I look forward to being able to nurture the programme and the students within it. The future looks very bright for AFC/UCL and Yale collaborations!

## Paula Lopez Ramos

### 1. What made you decide to pursue the DNP course?

There are many reasons why I applied for the DNP MRes course, the main one being that I want to research the role of the early environment and how it impacts child development, particularly mental health outcomes. I had conducted previous research on the effect of early life stress on the development of the amygdala inhibitory neurons in rats, and I was fascinated by the concept of periods of plasticity. I think that being able to target interventions at a time where the brain is particularly sensitive to our environment is crucial because it can set people on more adaptive life trajectories that are healthier and more fulfilling.

The MRes has the unique strength of combining a wide range of perspectives, from neuroscience to psychoanalysis, so that as a cohort you engage with different frameworks to help understand child development. I loved that the course really pushed for an interactive and more discussion-based approach to learning. Additionally, being able to pursue a year of research at the Yale Child Study Center seemed like an unmissable opportunity!

### 2. What had you done academically/professionally prior to the course?

I completed a BSc with Honours in Anatomy and Cell Biology with a minor in Neuroscience at McGill University in Montreal, Canada. I am convinced that to successfully therapeutically alleviate the distress associated with child psychopathologies, it is key to first understand the biological mechanisms by which the environment impacts brain development during critical periods. McGill afforded me the exposure to an extraordinary variety of frameworks from which to understand dysfunctions in the nervous system. To put my knowledge into practice, I completed a summer internship at the Paris Brain Institute (ICM)



Photo of Paula at Yale



'education bienveillante' in a kindergarten in Paris. I had also provided mentorship support at McGill in elementary schools that were underrepresented in the university, helping with homework but also trying to foster a sense of confidence and curiosity for future learning. I grew up in Mexico City, where socio-economic disparities abound, so I had first-hand experience of seeing how we do not all start on the same footing in life.

### 3. How did you find the first year of the course in London?

Coming from a more biological background, the first year of the course involved a lot of new material for me in terms of psychological theories and discussions around what is typical psychological and brain development. The discussions and the guest lecturers were really fascinating and engaging. The lectures as well as seminars from multiple perspectives triggered a

in 2017 where I worked alongside a PhD candidate, assisting her research in Alzheimer's disease in a *Drosophila* model. While my courses at McGill enabled me to grasp the functioning of the brain and body with a multidimensional approach, the project that cemented my aim to pursue developmental neuroscience was my Honours research project [described earlier] at the Douglas Mental Health Institute under the supervision of Dr Walker.

lot of thinking around, for example, the etiology of mental illness symptoms, as well as how they are maintained throughout the lifespan. I think what made the experience so enjoyable (despite happening during lockdown), was the evident passion of those involved for improving the quality of life and mental health outcomes for children and adolescents.

In addition to these enriching professional and academic opportunities, I had the privilege of helping implement the newer guidelines for

On a more social level, it was really tough to have to shift from a hybrid model of teaching to a fully virtual one, once the second lockdown happened.



We were all eager to spend time with each other and have a normal 'classroom' experience but were not able to do that for most of the year.

Fortunately, Dr Puetz and Dr Steinbeis were always really accessible and supportive in terms of wellbeing in general. It really helped knowing that there was always someone you could reach out to if you were struggling on some level, and who would listen and guide you to the right resources. It was a real game-changer.

#### 4. What was the move to the US like? In terms of the transition, what aspects were straightforward and which ones were more challenging?

As I had already studied for my undergraduate degree in Canada, the transition to a North-American lifestyle did not really feel as intense. However, the process of acquiring a student visa was strenuous, since the embassies only had very few and select appointments available. New covid rules made the whole process extremely challenging. A more specific challenge in the move was finding accommodation. I remember landing at the end of August and having to join my flatmate Anna in an apartment visit as soon as I touched ground! Having someone who has a social insurance number as well as an American credit score definitely helped in securing an apartment!

#### 5. What is it like living in the US?

Living in the US was a really enriching experience. I think the American culture has the benefit of having a very open-minded approach to new ways of thinking. I loved that there were so many different cultures represented at Yale, and you hear a lot of different languages being spoken. I think that is the true strength of the US. Additionally, although New Haven is quite small, it has the benefit of being a two-hour train ride from either Boston or New York. It was great to be able to explore those cities on a whim for weekends and really take advantage of the short time based here.

Photo of library at Yale University



## 6. As a non-US citizen, what things do you find noticeably American?

This might seem trivial, but what really stood out to me was the food...the portion sizes are just massive! Whilst the people are friendlier and more talkative, I also feel like forming a genuine connection is relatively harder. Also, I think the going out culture is quite different. In Europe we have a much more casual approach to drinking; you can meet up for one drink and then just go home, but here it seems like it's an all or nothing scenario. Yet most bars close around 10pm and clubs around 1:30am, so all a bit of a shock!

## 7. How do you find studying at Yale?

I think that for the first month that I was here, I could not believe that I had actually been accepted onto the programme and was attending Yale. The campus is really beautiful and you are surrounded by people who are passionate about, and clearly excel at what they do.



Photo of ice hockey match

## 8. How is it different to AFC/UCL?

I think it is important to note that the first year we had was during lockdown, so despite having made great use of the UCL libraries, I did not have the chance to experience the 'real' AFC/UCL. In general, I think that the first year was more course-based and we had more seminars and lectures, which meant everyone generally had the same schedule.

Given that we are doing research most of the time in Yale and don't have a busy class schedule like we did in the first year, I have appreciated the autonomy that this lends us. Depending on which lab you attend, some mentors prefer being in-person while others are more flexible with your mode of working, so we have had a lot of fun exploring and working in different cafés and libraries (especially at the School of Management). I tend to go into the lab three or four days a week, but there is no strict time for arriving or leaving so that suits my work style quite well.

## 9. Have you managed to engage in university life outside of your course?

Yes! Since we only have a year here and time flies, we really wanted to make the most of it. We have tried to attend a lot of student events (although some have been virtual), but the most fun has been attending the Yale games. I think the collegiate game experience is something that we do not have in Europe whereas here, school spirit really comes through! It has been super fun to attend all kinds of sports, from hockey, to basketball, to 'The Game', which is the annual football game played against Harvard. Additionally, we have also attended a bunch of trivia nights, and made friends with people in other schools (like the School of Management), so that has been really enjoyable.

## 10. What aspects of your course (second year) do you find most useful? Most interesting?

Our weekly seminars where we learned about different areas of research being undertaken at the Child Study Center were really thought-provoking. I





Photo of Paula (third from left) and friends

loved that our cohort was made to feel like we were part of the Child Study Center fabric, and we could meet with researchers spearheading fascinating and important research. Having the opportunity to interact with people who are dedicating their lives' work to the improvement of child mental health outcomes was inspiring. More practically, what I really enjoyed about the second year was the self-paced quality and independent study for the project.

### 11. Are there any aspects of the second year of the course that have been particularly challenging?

Personally, what I found challenging was getting used to the pace of work that was expected, since coming in I had no real idea about what the workload would be like. I think it took me a while to get comfortable enough with my subject of research, which is epigenetic ageing, to feel like I could talk about it and critically think about my project. It felt like the goalposts were constantly moving at the start. However, things did eventually improve as I got used to the feeling that there will always be more to learn, but that at some point you just need to put your head down and do the work. Science is such a fast-paced field with so many relevant research papers coming out daily that it can be quite daunting to get introduced to a new field. It was all about having patience with the frustration that it triggered and then just repeating to myself that probably a lot of people felt that way too! I have learned so much and it's a field of research I might not have had the opportunity to immerse myself in as much as I did. I am completely grateful for it.

### 12. Has it changed you as a person? In what way?

Definitely. The uniqueness of this programme for me was that the focus was not solely on memorising and learning things, but that it required us to engage personally with the material. Since we are constantly discussing child development and what the environmental as well as biological factors are that support a child's success, it inherently leads to self-reflectiveness about our own history. It would be quite hard to engage with the material without acknowledging our own past and present, and it was always highlighted as essential in order to check our own implicit biases. I know there is the famous saying in psychology (that my fellow DNP friend and flatmate Anna loves to repeat), that: "Some people are doing research, while others are here for mesearch". Honestly, I think it has been a bit of both for me! Additionally, I have to really thank my close friends Ellie, Anushay, and Jen in the cohort. I have been able to have such open and honest conversations about things that are quite hard to talk about. Most people in the programme are genuinely empathetic, and it is really heart-warming to be surrounded by people with a natural ability to authentically care.

### 13. Are you glad you did the course and if so, why?

Again, definitely. You would be hard-pressed to find a more ambitious programme that aims to link neuroscience, cognitive science, psychology,



Photo of Yale bus



computational methods, and psychoanalytic theories in the realm of brain development and psychopathology. I have honestly learned so much from experts in the field, and it has been such a motivating and encouraging environment created by our masters' coordinators Dr Steinbeis, Dr Puetz, and Dr Rutherford. I have been constantly challenged in my own thinking, as well as made to feel like my perspective has a seat at the table – not an easy feat, since I know we all grappled with impostor syndrome! I have learned a lot from my peers' perspectives informed by their academic and professional experiences, resulting in a change in how I see things.

In addition to the first year, being able to work under the uplifting mentorship of Dr Kieran O'Donnell at Yale has really reaffirmed my choice to pursue research in how we can better protect children against threats to their developmental success, especially by looking at perinatal maternal mental health. I loved learning and thinking critically about incredible new tools such as calculating epigenetic age and implementing them in a subject that I am

passionate about. I am much more confident in my abilities, and I really am sure that I am pursuing the right path for me.

#### 14. What are you thinking of doing after completing the course?

I want to pursue a PhD in London, on the importance of the early life environment in the context of neuroscience and child development. I am really interested in studying the neural mechanisms underlying mental illness onset and maintenance, but through a transdiagnostic lens. I am currently still looking for interesting opportunities and might consider a research assistant position as well to gain more experience. I know that I am passionate about finding useful and tailored targets for psychosocial or medical interventions that will ensure children can reach their full potential.

#### 15. What would you say to another student considering embarking upon the course?

Do it! I would honestly just encourage them to apply. I really want to highlight the uniqueness of this course, and the incredible attention to detail and care surrounding the construction of the two years. I really do not know of any other Master's programme that combines the ability to learn from all kinds of perspectives, while valuing yours, and then enabling you to conduct research matched to your interests. Also, you will be surrounded by people who are passionate about improving child and adolescent welfare, from a multitude of approaches. It has given me a lot of hope for the future. Participating in this course been such a privilege and it is certainly an experience that has shaped me (for the better!), and whose lessons and memories I will carry forever.



Photo of Yale University buildings



Thank you to Dr Rutherford and Paula for sharing their experiences and giving us an insight into the DNP course as well as a glimpse into life at Yale. The course is evidently a perfect example of successful international collaboration, with students having optimal learning and living experiences in two globally renowned educational institutions in two very different cities. For more information about the course, you can hear from Professor Nikolaus Steinbeis and Dr Vanessa Puetz (Joint Programme Directors for DNP) and past alumni by visiting this link: [www.annafreud.org/ucl-postgraduate-study/ucl-postgraduate-programmes/developmental-neuroscience-and-psycho-pathology-mres/](http://www.annafreud.org/ucl-postgraduate-study/ucl-postgraduate-programmes/developmental-neuroscience-and-psycho-pathology-mres/)



# Book Corner

Welcome to our first Book Corner! In this section, we ask a professional to tell us about a book that has had a significant impact on them in some capacity and influenced the way they work. Our first 'book corner' is with Dr Vanessa Puetz and her chosen book is *Far from the Tree: Parents, Children and the Search for Identity* by Andrew Solomon. If you would like to share a book that has been instrumental in your life in some way, please get in touch and email us at [alumni@annafreud.org](mailto:alumni@annafreud.org)



**How did you come across this book by Andrew Solomon and when did you read it?**

I remember reading a review of the book in a newspaper the year that the book was published [2014] and felt intrigued to read it because of the author and the developmental topic being explored. I already knew Andrew Solomon as the renowned author of *The Noonday Demon: An Anatomy of Depression* and by virtue of my job, I am always interested in material that relates to children and their families. I ordered the book after reading the newspaper review.

**What do you perceive to be the key message of the book?**

Parenting is hard! That is what I would say is the key message, simply put. And parenting children who are very different from you, can be even more challenging but also rewarding.

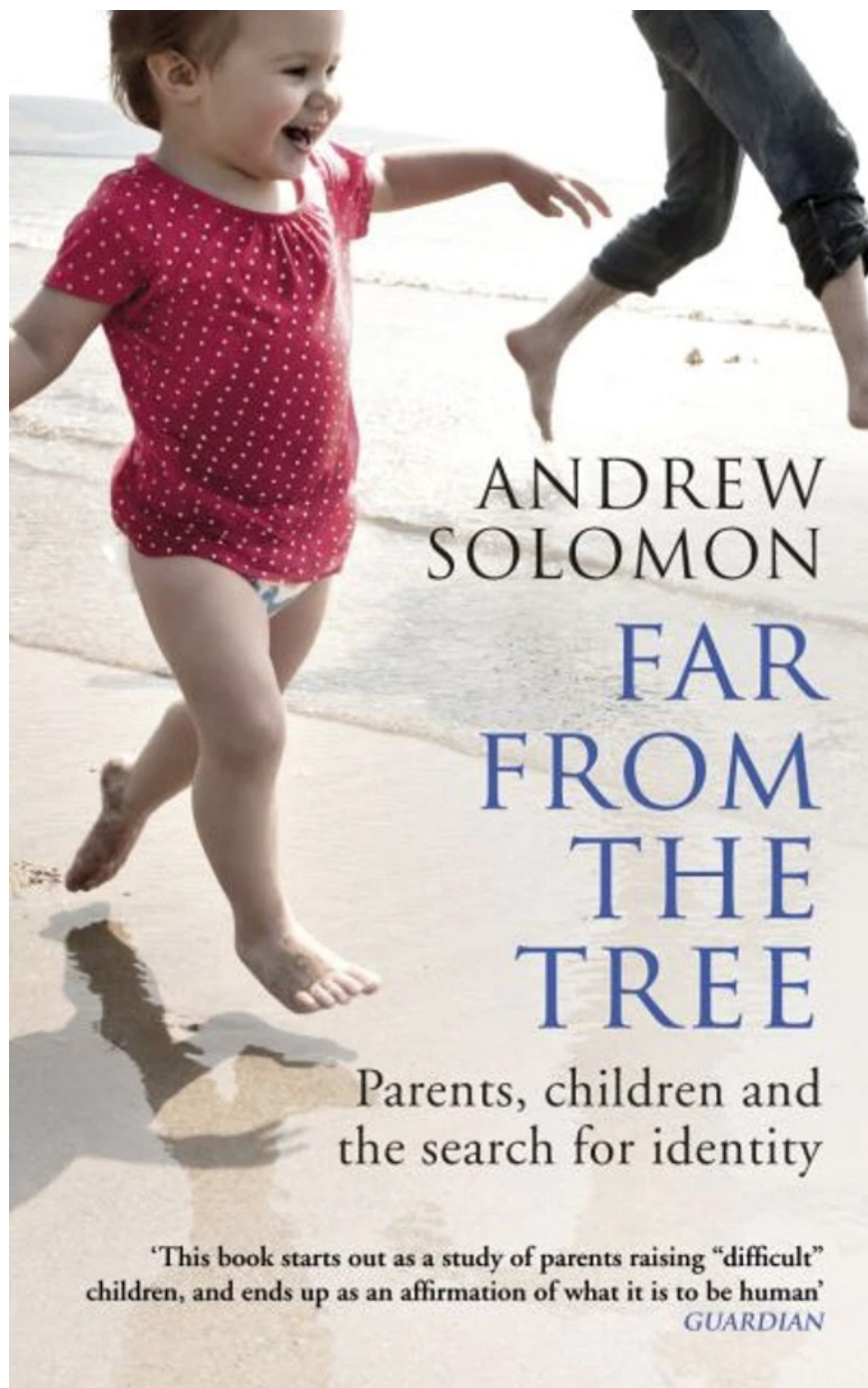
Salomon explores what it means for a family to be marginalised because their children are

considered different to the 'norm', and the topic of stigmatisation is also something we think a lot about at the centre and in our teaching. The method he applied is laudable – Solomon did a huge amount of empirical research; he interviewed hundreds of families over almost 10 years, exploring a wide range of subjects such as disability, schizophrenia, autism, and young people who commit crime. He shows how a sense of isolation impacts the quality of life for the child, the parents and other family members. The experiences of those featured in the book highlight how important it is to them to be part of support networks and belong to a community with others who are in the same marginalised group. At the same time the message is also that we can learn so much from families and their children who do not meet our preconceptions – and there is a real chance to rid us of our stereotypes.

**How did the book impact you?**

I have always wanted to understand and promote the rights of minority groups, hence my work relating to EDI (equity, diversity and inclusion). The





case-studies are fascinating and really made me want to understand more about how marginalisation can impact families. As research psychologists, we now recognise the importance of co-production and lived experiences, but what is amazing is that Solomon was already doing this a decade ago.

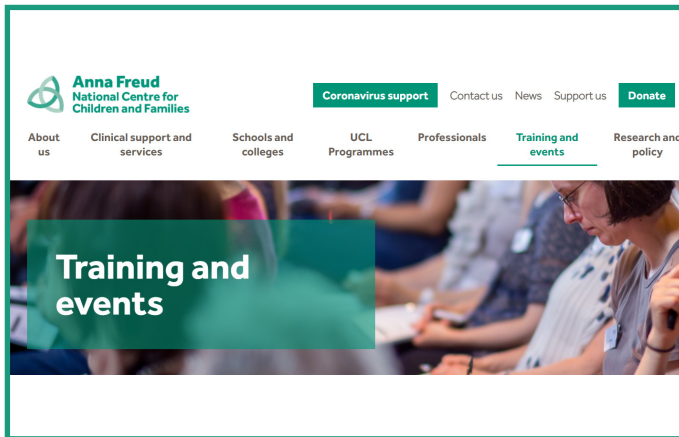
Reading the book really changed my perspective on parenting. Interestingly I read the book before becoming a parent and whilst it made a deep impact on me then, it was a totally different experience when I re-read it once I had become a parent. I approached the issues raised in the book from a totally different

standpoint and I questioned how hard I would find it to be marginalised if my child were different. As a parent reader, I became so much more emotionally involved.

*Who would you recommend this book to?*

In my opinion, it should be read by anyone working with children and parents. As professionals in this field, the first-hand accounts in the book will give you a much deeper appreciation of difference and the pain and passion that is parenting.

# Training, events and offers



The AFC runs a variety of courses and webinars that may be relevant in your field of work. To see the full range of training courses – some of which are free, visit our [training and events pages](#) on the website.

## New PG Diploma in Child and Adolescent Psychology and Neuroscience in Practice (CAPNiP)

We are pleased to announce the launch of the Centre's first distance learning programme, run in conjunction with UCL. This new PG Diploma in Child and Adolescent Psychology and Neuroscience in Practice (CAPNiP) is being run by Dr Vanessa Puetz and provides a comprehensive overview of child and adolescent mental health introducing core concepts, theories and models of current evidence-based practice. The programme are recruiting now for their first intake in September 2023! Please do share to your professional networks within the UK and internationally.

Click the following link to find out more about our new distance learning programme: <https://www.annafreud.org/ucl-postgraduate-study/ucl-postgraduate-programmes/child-and-adolescent-psychology-and-neuroscience-in-practice-pg-dip-distance-learning/>

More information can be found and bookings made on our upcoming events webpage: <https://www.annafreud.org/ucl-postgraduate-study/upcoming-events/>

You can also email the CAPNiP team at [CAPNiP.admin@annafreud.org](mailto:CAPNiP.admin@annafreud.org) if you have any questions.



# Outside the Box

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