

July 2020 Newsletter

Welcome to this 28th edition of the fabtic quarterly newsletter.

This special-length edition features an interview with former Assistant Chief Probation Officer Roz Morrison.

It also has details about new resource packs for firesetter intervention work and online firesetter foundation training.

Values in Frontline Work

An interview with Roz Morrison

Roz Morrison is one of the few black women to have ever reached the role of Assistant Chief Probation Officer in the UK. In her current role as senior lecturer and researcher at De Montfort University, she uses her decades of frontline experience and academic position to teach newly appointed trainee probation officers the values needed in frontline work.

Roz explains more in conversation with Joanna Foster of fabtic.

JF – I've always been impressed by your genuine empathy for others, including those who have sometimes done the most terrible of crimes. What allows you to be able to do this?

Roz – I have a strong belief that people can change. This is my starting point; that everyone can change, and everyone deserves an opportunity to explore how this could look for them. When I work with people who have committed very serious crimes, the way I think about them is as a whole human being and that the crime they have committed is just one part of who they are. That person is a brother, a son, a mother, a sister. There are other elements to that person and that is the part that I'm genuinely interested in – the human part.

This is the part that I connect to. This allows me to see them, to get to know them. I call it being curious in a kind way about their life. About who they are and what things they like, what they dislike, and what helps them. Then we can start to



JF – It is clear your empathy comes from the very heart of you. Is genuine empathy something that can be taught in the training room? Or is it a case that you either have it or you don't?

Roz – Often you will meet people and they exude genuine empathy. You think to yourself "Yes, they've got it." That special quality is an in-built part of who they are. Therefore, can it be taught? Yes. But it requires a skilled trainer and a group of people who want to get in touch with, and increase, their empathy.

The reason I think this is because everyone of us is connected to someone. Even those people we think show no empathy, whose behaviour is cruel and difficult, there is still likely to be someone they care about. The care and upset they would feel if someone important to them was hurt, that's empathy.

Most people we work with can express a connection to someone close to them. It is our role to recognise these feelings and enable that person to relate these to someone else, especially those they see as the "other". They can then start to connect in a way they had never thought about.

An Interview with Roz Morrison

A timely example of how we can learn empathy is the current COVID-19 pandemic.

In many ways, lockdown is making many of us experience situations we never before could have imagined. To not go out as we want to. To not be allowed to spend time with loved ones. To have these and so many other choices taken away from us. To be excluded from opportunities. To have our freedoms curtailed. To be in constant fear because of an unpredictable threat to our health and wellbeing. This is the daily lived experience of women living with domestic abuse. Lockdown is making many of us think about these women and children in a way we haven't had to before. By experiencing similar feelings that we could never before imagine, we can become more empathetic.

JF – You're clearly passionate about the role training can play in teaching empathy but in times of austerity, like we are experiencing now, staff training is often cutback. What are your thoughts on this?

Roz – It is a worry when training is de-prioritised in this way because there must always be a place for external expertise. Sometimes we think, "Oh, I can do in-house training" but it can never replace bringing in somebody who is an expert in their field, and who comes in and does so much more than simply read out a PowerPoint.

Training is a skill, and providing external training is an investment in staff. It is genuinely concerning when organisations literally say, "Right, we're going to have no more external training." This is extremely short-sighted.

However, we also have to think differently about training and see it as part of an ongoing process. Organisations have to develop reflective ways of working and thinking that enable us to be continuously learning, continuously thinking, continuously evaluating our behaviour. This doesn't take a lot of money and is an ethos that we can actively develop within each organisation. Encourage staff to read, listen to the news, follow blogs and continuously look for opportunities to learn. Reflect when things go well and when they don't. Make yourself a learning organisation through case supervision because we can understand ourselves and others better through different perspectives. As professionals it is our business to keep learning and



JF – In the weeks since the killing of George Floyd, questions are being asked on how we take down the structures that enable institutional racism. Do you think staff training has a part to play here?

Roz – Definitely. Without a doubt. We are addressing a huge issue and what has happened in the last month has re-ignited the whole conversation. This includes conversations that are taking place in the training room. The death of George Floyd has almost made these conversations easier to have in a way, even though they are often still as painful. It's easier to talk to people about the structural and institutional racism as being real, and that these conversations are valid. In the past we've often had to convince others that racist structures are real but now more people are saying yes, it's real, yes people's lived experiences are valid, and so what do we do about it?

We have to ask ourselves why it took the killing of a person for this to happen, and what are we going to do about this. Training of staff is critical here. This will be the difference between whether we are going to just play lip service to this or are we really going to challenge our current thinking, our biases, and be truly self-reflective. This is our opportunity to talk about British history in the training room in a way that people potentially haven't known before, or been particularly interested in learning about. This is where training can get us to really look at ourselves, to understand our biases and how we view the world. Training gives us the opportunity to have conversations where we educate ourselves. It keeps these discussions on the agenda and plays a huge part in helping us understand one another better.

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NEW RESOURCE PACKS FOR FIRESETTER INTERVENTION WORK

Finding suitable, age-appropriate resources to use in direct work with children and teenagers can be time consuming and frustrating for already busy staff members and managers. Approaching procurement departments to purchase jigsaws, story books and colouring pads can lead to raised eyebrows at best, and a firm no at worst.

To help, fabtic now produces resource packs for use by practitioners who work directly with children and teenagers to teach fire safety and the dangers of setting fires.

Each pack contains a wide range of colourful, hands-on resources and practical activities that can be used for children aged 0-7 years, 8-11 years, and 12 years upwards. These age groups mirror the age groups outlined in the book, 'Children and Teenagers Who Set Fires: Why they do it and how to help' (J. E. Foster, 2020). Published by Jessica Kingsley Publishers the book outlines the fire safety messages appropriate to each of these three age groups, using Piaget's theory of cognitive development to inform the approach taken.

Building on these messages, the resource packs are further informed by wider theories of child development and play. This means that the extensive variety of books, toys, games and creative activities in every pack not only help teach fire safety but also help nurture and enhance children and teenagers' fine motor skills, their imaginations, confidence and problem-solving skills.

Each pack costs £160+VAT (inclusive of P&P within GB). For more details and to place an order

ONLINE CPD ACCREDITED FIRESETTER TRAINING

In response to requests received and to accommodate new ways of working during COVID-19, fabtic's popular firesetter foundation training is now delivered online.

Suitable for staff new to working with children and teenagers who set fires, the accredited course also provides valuable CPD training for practitioners across the children's workforce. This is because in addition to exploring the reasons for child-set fires and how best to respond, the course also covers 'what works' in behaviour change, defensible decision-making in family work, child development, attachment, trauma and how to protect the protectors through the emotional demands of frontline work.

Attended by practitioners from across the UK, the course provides an excellent way to create new support networks and stay connected to children and families work, even during restricted working practices.

The next 5-day course runs on 20, 22, 24, 28 and 30 July from 0930 – 1630hrs each day. The cost to attend is £110+VAT per day. For more details and to book please call 020 7249 0652 or email info@fabtic.co.uk