

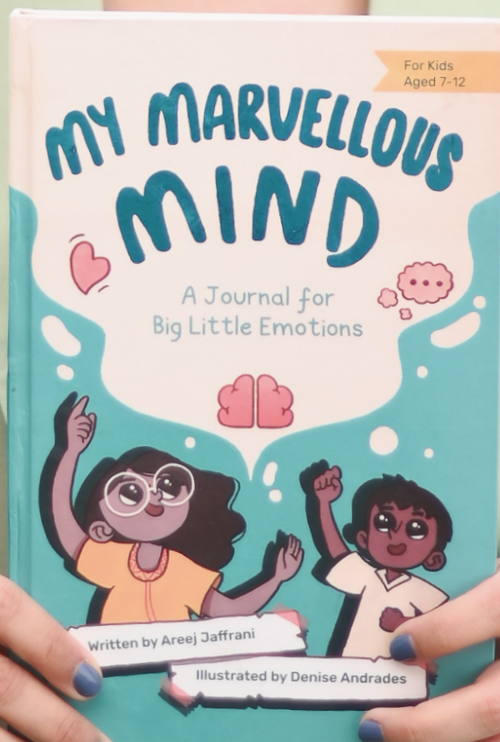


Outside the box



Areej
Jaffrani

The global
force of shared
knowledge



Anna Freud

Editorial

Welcome to our autumn magazine where we explore the relative merits of international knowledge exchange. As Anna Freud alumni, you will personally have experienced the power of education to open doors, broaden minds and support the application of knowledge and skills gained, within real-life contexts. In today's world of rapid communication and interconnected economies, that power is amplified when knowledge, expertise and experience transcend borders. This issue highlights that we cannot underestimate the advantages of disseminating knowledge internationally, and its subsequent value in the field of children's mental health globally.

On page 6 we look at the impressive career of Professor Nick Midgley who is an Anna Freud alum himself! Having lived in Japan and travelled to numerous countries to provide training on various topics including mentalization-based treatment (MBT), Nick explains how effective international collaborations are. He makes the valuable point that: "By teaching you also have an opportunity to learn." When we engage with diverse perspectives and solve problems alongside peers from different cultures, it engenders mutual growth. Knowledge shared is knowledge multiplied.

Our second featured alum is Areej Jaffrani (page 13) and amongst her many achievements since leaving Anna Freud, Areej instigated an attitudinal shift in the way mental health is perceived and addressed within communities and schools in Pakistan. We are incredibly proud that Areej – along with many of our alumni – are taking what they learnt at Anna Freud and using those skills and knowledge for the betterment of underserved communities globally.

Interestingly, both Nick and Areej had planned on different career paths but were drawn to the field of mental health. Driven by an evident passion to help, by sharing knowledge across cultures and continents,

their work is making a lasting global imprint and a difference to the lives and futures of many young people around the world.

If you have a yearning to study again, turn to page 22 to find out about our innovative new MSc in Psychology and Trauma starting in September. This fully distance learning programme (delivered in collaboration with UCL) highlights how digital advances help increase accessibility to information. Offering online learning opportunities enhances the scope for international knowledge exchange through wider application of theories and dissemination of the latest evidence-based research and clinical techniques.

We hope you enjoy reading this magazine and if you would like to be featured in a future issue, or if you have any article feedback or suggestions, we would love to hear from you.



Neelam Dongha
Alumni Magazine
Editor

Please get in touch at
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Welcome

It's a pleasure to welcome you to this issue of our alumni magazine. I am a Professor in Child and Adolescent Mental Health at UCL and the Co-Head of Postgraduate Studies at Anna Freud – a role I took up almost four years ago now. I am delighted to be part of this special community at Anna Freud and am continually inspired by the work happening across this pioneering organisation.

This edition highlights something close to my heart: the extraordinary value of knowledge-sharing across borders. As a clinical academic who moved from Australia to the UK early in my career, and who has the privilege of working with researchers and clinicians from across the world, I have seen first-hand the benefits of working globally to listen and to share ideas for research, education, and system change. It broadens our perspectives and deepens our understanding of the human experience. The insights we gain from teaching, learning, and collaborating internationally are not only enriching—they are essential.

Overseas engagement prompts us to confront our assumptions, adapt our methods, and expand our ways of thinking. In the field of mental health, this kind of exchange enhances everything from our theories through to intervention and prevention approaches, making our profession more inclusive and representative of the diversity it seeks to understand.

My passion for international exchange is rooted in a belief that child mental health challenges – particularly following trauma and adversity – are global public health issues. By working across diverse settings, I have seen how sharing evidence-based practices and advances in our field can accelerate innovation, broaden our understanding of effective care, and ultimately, reduce disparities in mental health support both in the UK and globally.

Thank you for being part of our vibrant, international, alumni community. We hope this edition inspires you to think globally, collaborate boldly, and continue building a future where mental health knowledge and care knows no borders.

Warm wishes,

Rachel



Professor Rachel Hiller

Rachel Hiller is a Professor in Child & Adolescent Mental Health at UCL; a Co-Director of the UK Trauma Council; and Co-Head of Postgraduate Studies at Anna Freud. Rachel is a member of the Executive Committee and Board of Directors for the International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies (ISTSS), where she is also Chair of the Public Health and Policy committee.

Her research is in the field of complex child trauma and mental health, with a particular focus on improving the identification and support of the mental health needs of care-experienced young people.

Alumni Achievements

Anya gets published

Congratulations to current student, Anya Jan, who recently had an article published by the British Psychological Society (BPS). Her piece, **Can AI Help Children We Were Otherwise Unable to Reach?** explores how AI-driven tools can enhance accessibility to psychological support for children who might otherwise struggle to access care. You can read the published article [here](#).

In this feature story, Anya describes her passion for bridging gaps in mental health support, and why she is excited about how technology and psychology can intersect.



“After completing my undergraduate degree in psychology at Columbia University, I worked for a year as an assistant psychologist in Dubai. I am currently undertaking the Developmental Psychology and Clinical Practice master’s programme at Anna Freud. Of Pakistani descent, I was born and raised in Dubai, and my experiences working in underserved communities have profoundly influenced my academic and professional interests. From a young age, I was drawn to understanding how early life experiences shape development, particularly in children who face systemic barriers to care. My work now focuses on child development, attachment, and the integration of technology in mental health support, with a particular interest in reaching children who might otherwise lack access to psychological services.

My interest in child psychology and development was first sparked when my sister was adopted from Pakistan when I was ten years old. The experience made me think deeply about how her life could have taken a completely different path dependent upon the circumstances of her early years. This realisation stayed with me and led me to volunteer in orphanages and slum communities in Pakistan throughout my teenage years. I worked closely with children who had been displaced or lacked stable caregiving environments.

As I pursued my undergraduate studies at Columbia University, my passion for child

psychology was further refined through coursework and hands-on experience working with clinical psychologists. I became increasingly interested in understanding how systemic challenges impact children's development and how innovative interventions – particularly those leveraging technology – could bridge gaps in access to care. This blend of personal experience, academic learning, and clinical exposure led me to explore how AI could be integrated into mental health support for children who are otherwise hard to reach.

Once I submitted the piece to the BPS, it was a highly collaborative effort that involved multiple rounds of edits to ensure clarity, accuracy, and accessibility for a broad readership. Seeing the final piece published was incredibly rewarding, as it brought together years of academic exploration and personal passion in a way that could hopefully spark further conversation about AI's role in child psychology.

I am scheduled to graduate at the end of 2026, and by then I hope to have a few more publications contributing to the developmental and clinical psychology field. I have just collaborated with Professor Leslie Gutman from UCL on a paper that explores signposting in mental health services, which we have submitted for publication.

Additionally, I am collaborating with the Longitudinal Experiences and Adjustments in Parenthood Study (LEAPS) at Anna Freud, where I am leading a research study on prenatal mothers' experiences during their third trimester; another project I hope to see published.

Alongside these research endeavours, I am working on my master's thesis, which focuses on attachment in adopted children, a topic that is personally significant to me. Looking ahead, I plan to apply for a PhD at UCL and my long-term goal is to continue contributing to research that unites psychological theory with

real-world applications, particularly in underserved populations.

Beyond my current research, I remain passionate about the transformative potential of interdisciplinary approaches in psychology. Blending technology with traditional methods can open new treatment and early intervention avenues, particularly in often-overlooked communities. I am eager to connect with fellow alumni who share a similar passion and learn from those who have already navigated the early stages of their careers in this dynamic field.”



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Networks & communities

Careers & education

Resources

Counselling and psychotherapy, Cyberpsychology

Can AI help the children we're otherwise unable to reach?

Anya Jan, a master's student in Developmental Psychology and Clinical Practice at University College London, explores how AI can transform mental health care.

18 February 2025



As a young woman of Pakistani descent, I have experienced the health care faced by under-served communities. Limited resources often mean that those in need do not get the care they are usually relegated to whispers behind closed doors. Conditions like anxiety or depression as mere phases or symptoms leaves many without the support they desperately need.

Although I'm of Pakistani descent, I was born and raised in the UK, which shaped my worldview. Growing up in such a dynamic environment, understanding how culture, environment and opportunity intersect for studying child development felt intensely personal and relevant. Reflecting on how different her life could have been if she had the dream of working to help under-served communities.

Anna Freud news

Spotlight on Professor Nick Midgley

A well-respected expert in his field, Professor Nick Midgley has paved the way with his research and work in child psychotherapy. As alumni, many of you will have been taught by Professor Midgley during your time at Anna Freud. What you may not know however, is that Professor Midgley is an Anna Freud alum himself!

In this feature, we learn about his experience as an Anna Freud student, his prolific and innovative research, what he gained from his time abroad, and we also get a rare insight into his life outside of work. Having lived in Japan and travelled to numerous countries to provide training on various topics including mentalization-based treatment (MBT), Professor Midgley illustrates perfectly the mutual benefits of sharing knowledge across borders. We hear about his experience living and teaching overseas, how that has enhanced his own learning and how football has influenced his thinking about psychotherapy training.

“I know that a lot of our alumni made plans for many years before coming to study in London, but I’m slightly embarrassed to say that I rather stumbled upon the opportunity to study at Anna Freud. After I finished university, where I studied English Literature, I went to live and work in Japan and stayed there for three years. It was a fantastic opportunity, but when I came back to London, I honestly wasn’t sure about what to do next. I had a long-standing interest in psychoanalysis, and enjoyed working with children, so when a friend told me that UCL had just partnered up with Anna Freud to offer a new MSc in Psychoanalytic Developmental Psychology, I thought I’d give it a try. Although I lacked experience, I was offered a place.

Professor Nick Midgley



Anna Freud was a fairly small organisation at the time, still based in Maresfield Gardens in Hampstead [before Anna Freud moved to current premises in Rodney Street, Islington in 2019], and this was the only postgraduate course that was available. As students we had plenty of opportunities to sit down with senior staff, and to attend meetings where we could hear about the clinical work with children. I remember attending a presentation by one of the child therapy trainees where she described her clinical work. I recall being so moved and inspired, thinking: “This is something I would happily spend my whole life doing!” The work was challenging, complex and showed what a difference could be made to a child’s life if help came at the right moment and in the right way. It influenced my decision to apply to stay on and do the doctoral training in child psychotherapy at Anna Freud/UCL.

This was the first year that the training had become a professional doctorate, which meant I also had to do a piece of research alongside my clinical placement in the NHS. For my dissertation, I was lucky enough to be supervised by Mary Target, who was then doing a study on the long-term follow-up of child analysis. My role was to do a qualitative analysis of the memories that the adult participants had of being in therapy as children. At the time, the UCL Psychology Department did not have any qualitative researchers, so I had to go elsewhere to get qualitative supervision. I was fortunate to meet and speak with Jonathan Smith at Birkbeck, who was just then developing ‘Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis’, a qualitative method of exploring personal experiences in depth, and he joined as my secondary supervisor. The training got me fascinated by the combination of clinical practice and research; this combination has stayed with me ever since.

Learning evolved quite naturally into teaching. Towards the end of my training, I was asked to teach a seminar on Psychoanalytic Theory on the MSc course,

Nick as a trainee with his son Thomas



Nick with colleagues

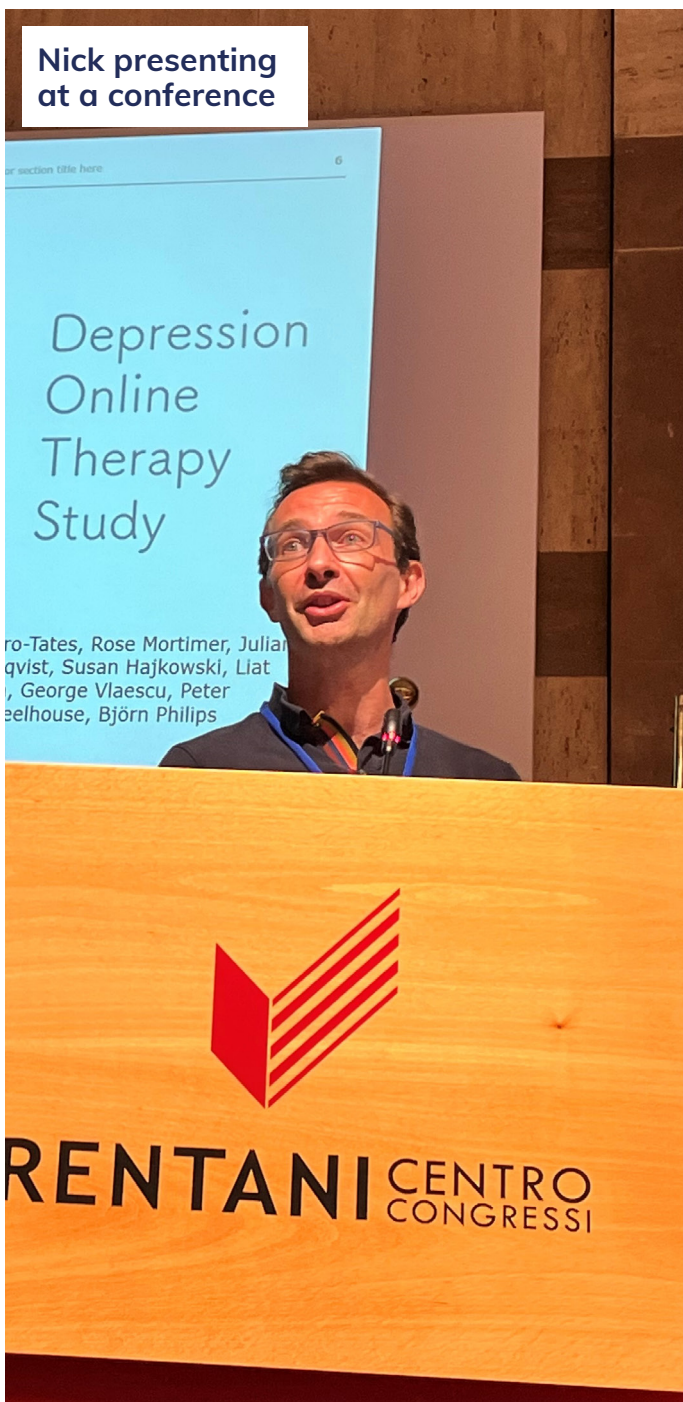


which I loved doing. For the next twenty years, I was fortunate to take on many different roles in Postgraduate Studies within the UCL-Anna Freud Partnership: I was a research tutor; developed a module (the first!) in qualitative research methods; and then became the module lead for the psychoanalytic theory course. At the time, Anna Freud and UCL were thinking about developing some new courses, so I had the opportunity to work on the design – and then become the first Programme Director, working alongside Fiona John as the Deputy – of the MSc in Developmental Psychology and Clinical Practice (DPCP). This was a great opportunity to develop a course that

we felt could offer a broader foundation for those wanting to go on and work in child mental health. We tried to make it the foundation course that we wished we had been given when starting out in this field! We were keen to be inter-disciplinary and move away from theoretical silos, hence the course was informed by different perspectives (including neuroscience, systemic thinking, psychoanalysis and so on). We felt proud that graduates could go on to train as clinical psychologists, child psychotherapists or child mental health researchers; building on the core ‘multiple perspectives’ approach.

Although I loved working on the DPCP course,

at a certain point an opportunity also came up to partner with the British Psychotherapy Foundation (bpf) in developing a doctoral child psychotherapy programme. The child psychotherapy training which I had done some years earlier had closed soon after I finished the course, which had been a great loss. As part of my own processing of that loss, I wrote a book about Anna Freud's work, in which my intention was to capture some of her core thinking, since it looked as if the next generation were not going to be given the chance to learn about her



pioneering ideas. Re-establishing a child psychotherapy training seemed a unique opportunity to bring Anna Freud's expertise back into the training of the next generation of child psychotherapists, whilst also bringing it up to date and making clinical research a more significant part of the programme. I became the first Academic Director of this new DPpsych course, and continued in my dual role, running both the MSc and the clinical doctorate, until I stepped down from the MSc in 2021 and the doctorate in 2023. Leaving Postgraduate Studies was a difficult step to take, but I also felt very proud to be able to step away and see how these two courses continued to grow and thrive.

Alongside my work in Postgraduate Studies, I continued to work in NHS Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services for about ten years after qualifying, whilst also trying to keep involved in research. Historically, child psychotherapy has not had a strong research tradition, and in many cases child therapists have been quite suspicious of empirical research. However, after my doctoral training, I became quite passionate about building stronger bridges between clinical practice and research – as well as promoting a kind of methodological pluralism, which gave equal weight to quantitative studies (including randomised controlled trials [RCTs]) and qualitative research, especially research that gave greater voice to children and young people.

Quite early on, I was very lucky to have the opportunity to take part in the IMPACT study, a UK-wide RCT comparing short-term psychoanalytic therapy (STPP) to cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT). As well as being part of the trial generally – helping to write a treatment manual, assessing treatment fidelity – I got my first major funding to conduct the IMPACT-ME study. This was a sub-study aiming to examine the experience of the young people (and their parents and therapists) who were taking part in IMPACT. We had a fantastic team working on this, including several PhD students who went on to develop their own clinical research

careers. We were also able to give many MSc and DPsych students the opportunity to do their own research dissertations using data from the IMPACT and IMPACT-ME studies. Since 2016 we've had over 100 publications emerging from the study, many of them co-authored by postgraduate students. (For a review, see Loades et al., 2023; Midgley et al., in press).

At its best, clinical practice and research and training are part of an ongoing dialogue, which both inform and are informed by training. But my own experience as a child psychotherapist, as well as learning from research, made it clear to me that certain aspects of how child psychotherapists work with young people needed to be rethought. In my view, the ideas emerging from mentalization theory and mentalization-based treatment (MBT) seemed to provide some useful guidance. As MBT had mostly been used with adults and older adolescents, I began to get interested in how MBT could be adapted for use with children and families, and this led me to set up the first international conference on MBT with Children, Young People and Families, in London in 2010. This formed the basis for the book 'Minding the Child', published by Routledge in 2012, and later to the development of a treatment guide for time-limited MBT for school-age children (published by APA in 2017).

Becoming involved in MBT opened my horizons to many international collaborations. There was a huge appetite among practitioners working with children and families in different countries to learn about this way of working, so I was given the chance to travel to many different parts of the world to provide MBT trainings. It is one of the great privileges of working at Anna Freud that you are given the opportunity to not only do your own work, but also to support and influence the work of others, in order to seek to improve the quality of mental health support offered to young people and their families. As with all training and education, by teaching you also have an opportunity to learn; observing how psychologists,

psychiatrists and therapists from around the world have engaged with MBT – and adapted these ideas to their own settings – has been very inspiring.

In my role as Professor of Psychological Therapies with Children and Young People at UCL and Anna Freud, I am also given many opportunities to build international collaborations. For example, with Sibel Halfon in Turkey we have just completed an RCT of time-limited MBT for children with emotional and behavioural problems (Halfon et al., 2024); while in Denmark we have been working on a similar project with colleagues wanting to explore the effectiveness of MBT for children in foster care (Dalgaard et al., 2023). In the last few years, I have been especially preoccupied with how we help to meet the mental health needs of children in foster care – as these are some of the most vulnerable children in our society, with some of the poorest mental health outcomes.

Since 2017, I have been collaborating with Sheila Redfern from the Family Trauma team at Anna Freud, on the development and testing of a mentalization-based Reflective Fostering Programme, to help foster (and kinship) carers build stronger relationships with the children in their care (Redfern and Midgley, 2024). We are now coming towards the end of a large, UK-wide RCT to evaluate this programme, the results of which will be published in 2025. Although the results have not yet been released, the first MSc students are already starting to use data from the study for their own dissertation projects – hopefully the first of many! And there has been a lot of interest in reflective fostering both within the UK and internationally. I'm delighted to say that the programme is currently being translated into Japanese, with ongoing discussions about a research collaboration there. Having come from Japan to start my studies at Anna Freud, it feels that the wheel is coming full circle!

As a child psychotherapist, and as an academic, I find it easy for my whole mind to be preoccupied by things related to work, so it is important for me to find time and

space for things outside – family, of course, and friends, but also other activities that give me pleasure. The first book I published was actually a book of poems and I still love reading and writing. I grew up around the theatre, and have always enjoyed plays, so during the COVID lockdown I tried my hand at writing a radio play, which was about James Joyce’s brother. The play was called ‘Bloomsday’ and was produced on the radio in 2022 to coincide with the 100th anniversary of the publication of Joyce’s most famous book, ‘Ulysses’. It was a fantastic experience to hear the words I’d written being brought to life by professional actors. Back in my days as an MSc student, we had actually performed a reading of a play about Freud’s case study of Dora, which was staged in the old library at Maresfield Gardens!

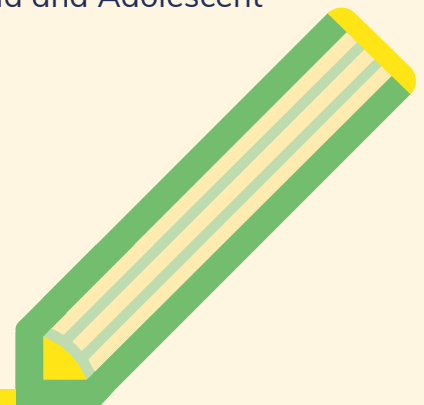
I also like to ‘get out of my head’ sometimes, which is why playing football is my other great after-work passion! As an incurable philomath (someone who loves to learn), I decided a couple of years ago to finally try and teach myself how to kick a ball with my left foot – something I had always avoided doing. Watching several YouTube videos and kicking a football around in the garden made me think a lot about how we learn, and how we teach – especially the kind of skills that need to be ‘in the body’ – and how we move from being able to use skills in a controlled context (my garden, or a therapy training seminar) to using them out in the ‘real world’ (on a football pitch or in a therapy room with a traumatised child). The experience made me think again about how we teach clinical skills and how we learn to become therapists, and wonder if we should perhaps be doing things a bit differently?

So even when I’m playing football, I’ve not left Postgraduate Studies behind entirely... everything seems to come back to training and education in the end!”



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Alumni stories

Areej Jaffrani: Spreading the word

Areej Jaffrani is an Anna Freud alum, having been a student on the MSc in Developmental Psychology and Clinical Practice programme from 2015 to 2017. Having identified and personally experienced a severe lack of mental health service provision for young people in Pakistan where she grew up, Areej has strived to fill this gap. And since graduating from Anna Freud, Areej has clearly achieved a great deal. Building on the skills and knowledge gained at Anna Freud, Areej created a mental health department in the school in Pakistan where she worked with positive results. This had a far-reaching impact with other schools replicating the provision of mental health services to their students. Areej has also run her own private practice and produced a wellbeing journal for children to develop their social-emotional skills.

Having made a difference to so many young lives and instigated change on a broader scale, we are immensely proud of what Areej has achieved so far. We look forward to following her story to see what the next chapter brings!

Areej Jaffrani



Please describe the journey that led you to Anna Freud.

I am originally from Pakistan but completed my bachelor's degree at McGill University in Canada. Initially, I was pursuing a major in economics, but everything changed when I took a psychology elective. It was a true lightbulb moment for me – I realised this was where my passion lay, and I immediately added psychology as my second major.

As I delved deeper into the subject, a course in developmental psychology stood out to me. It made me reflect – not only on the state of child and youth mental health in Pakistan, where awareness and services were almost non-existent – but also on my own experiences growing up. I thought about the struggles I had faced as a young person, the lack of understanding around those struggles, and how much it would have meant to have someone who truly saw and supported me during that time.

That realisation became my driving force. I wanted to be part of something that would help young people like me; youth who needed support, validation, and a safe space to navigate their emotions. This is what led me to the MSc in Developmental Psychology and Clinical Practice (DPCP) programme at Anna Freud. I saw it as a way to gain the knowledge and skills to support young people, whilst also advocating for better mental health services where they are needed most.

How was your experience at Anna Freud? Do you have any particular memories that stand out?

My experience at Anna Freud was truly unforgettable and I still look back at that time with great fondness. Beyond the excellent education and training, what stood out most for me were the people. The environment was incredibly supportive, with faculty and peers who were not only inspiring, but also approachable and always willing to help.

One of the most special aspects of my

time at Anna Freud was being part of a small, close-knit cohort. We formed deep connections, and many of those friendships have remained strong to this day. Studying at the historic Maresfield Gardens also made the experience unique; it provided opportunities to engage with our professors beyond the classroom and to connect with students from other programmes. It fostered a sense of community that made learning even more enriching.

Areej presenting at a school in Karachi



With colleagues from the DPCP cohort



Please tell me about your career journey since leaving Anna Freud.

After graduating from Anna Freud, I pursued additional training in play therapy and sand play therapy. I am currently working towards my Play Therapy certification and have recently become a registered sand play therapist.

Upon returning to Pakistan, I began my career as a play therapist at a private middle school in Karachi. However, I quickly realised that there was no proper infrastructure in place to support effective therapy within the school system. There were no mental health policies, safeguarding procedures or continuity of care for students as they transitioned through grades or campuses. Additionally, awareness of mental health and therapy was minimal among students, parents, and staff.

Having identified this gap, I proposed the creation of a dedicated mental health department, which led to my co-founding the school's Emotional Wellbeing Department. Over the next three years, I led the department across the school's five campuses, establishing mental health policies and procedures, and safeguarding and child protection protocols and procedures. I also developed training programmes for teachers and staff on how to identify students experiencing mental health difficulties and students at risk of harm from others or themselves, as well as workshops and seminars for students and parents to raise awareness and reduce stigma around mental health. One of the most impactful initiatives was integrating Social-Emotional Skills classes into the school's curriculum, helping students build emotional intelligence, resilience, and coping strategies.

What was the response to you suggesting these changes at the school?

There was definitely some initial pushback from staff, as incorporating these lessons meant adjusting the timetable and replacing what were seen as 'more important' subjects to make room. However, the resistance was far less than I had anticipated, and I think a key reason for this was timing. By the time we introduced the Social-Emotional Skills classes – two years after establishing the department – we had already done extensive awareness-building with staff, school leadership and parents. This groundwork helped shift perspectives on the importance of mental health education, and many were eager to see how the initiative would unfold.

It turned out that the parents were some of the strongest supporters of this change, especially since it was introduced during the pandemic; a time when emotional resilience was more crucial than ever. Students responded enthusiastically too, fully engaging in the lessons and enjoying the opportunity to explore their thoughts and feelings.

This department was one of the first of its kind in Pakistan and impacted over 700 students. The model went on to inspire other schools to introduce similar wellbeing programmes, expanding the conversation around child and adolescent mental health in the country.

Alongside this work, I also established my private practice in 2019, specialising in child and youth psychotherapy.

How did you find this and how did you juggle the two roles?

It was definitely challenging and often meant working long hours, sometimes up to 12 hours a day, including weekends. Balancing both roles required a high level of organisation and time management, which thankfully has always been one of my strengths.

That said, what truly kept me going was seeing the tangible impact of my work. Whether it was witnessing positive changes in the students at school or supporting children and families in my private practice, the difference I was making fuelled my motivation. Knowing that I was helping to create a lasting shift in the way mental health was approached in schools and within families made the hard work feel incredibly rewarding.

Tell me about your book and how it came about?

In June 2024, I published *My Marvellous Mind: A Journal for Big Little Emotions*, a wellbeing journal designed to help children develop essential social-emotional skills through engaging prompts and activities.

The idea for the book was born during the pandemic when I conducted an online mental health summer camp to provide children with a safe space to navigate the uncertainty and emotional challenges during that period. As part of the camp, I created a mental health toolkit, which later became the foundation for the journal. The book aims to help children build skills such as healthy emotional expression, resilience, a growth mindset, and practical coping strategies in a fun and accessible way.



Areej at her book launch



How have you used what you learnt at Anna Freud?

My time at Anna Freud has significantly shaped my approach to mental health on both an individual and systemic level. The training I received gave me a strong foundation in evidence-based interventions for children and adolescents, which I applied both in direct therapy work and in designing mental health programmes.

For example, when developing mental health awareness seminars for children and designing social-emotional skills lessons, I incorporated many resources from Anna Freud's Schools in Mind initiative, along with evidence-based CBT techniques to ensure the content was both engaging and effective. Additionally, during my clinical placement in my second year at Anna Freud, I was introduced to play-based psychoanalysis, which deeply influenced my therapeutic approach. This experience inspired me to pursue further training in play therapy, allowing me to integrate creative, child-centered techniques into my work with clients.

The emphasis on multi-disciplinary collaboration at Anna Freud influenced my work in building sustainable mental health structures within schools and beyond. For instance, during our CAMHS Clinical Practice in Context course, we worked on a group project where we had to design a mental health programme. Through our research, we discovered that leveraging existing community resources and collaborating with external services significantly enhances the support available to young people. This insight directly influenced my approach when building the school's Emotional Wellbeing Department. We prioritised establishing strong connections with trusted professionals and organisations, ensuring that when a student's needs extended beyond what we could provide within the school, we had reliable, vetted, and accessible referral pathways in place. This multi-disciplinary collaboration helped create a more comprehensive and sustainable support system for students.

On Pakistani TV to promote children's mental health



Where you do work now and what is your role?

I immigrated to Toronto, Canada, seven months ago and currently work as a child and teen therapist at two group practices. I am in the process of obtaining my full license as a registered psychotherapist in the province of Ontario while also working toward my certification in play therapy. This journey has been both exciting and fulfilling as I continue to grow in my practice and expand my skills set.

What do you think about sharing knowledge overseas? Has it influenced the way you work?

I believe that sharing knowledge across countries is incredibly valuable; it allows us to stay informed about best practices, learn from each other's successes, and continually improve the way we support mental health. My work has been deeply influenced by what I learned at Anna Freud and during my time in Canada. Many of the policies and procedures I developed in Pakistan were inspired by international frameworks and evidence-based practices from different countries.

However, I also learned that mental health initiatives cannot adopt a one-size-fits-all approach. Cultural values play a crucial role, and when developing the wellbeing programme in Pakistan, I couldn't simply replicate what worked elsewhere. I had to adapt and tailor these practices to ensure they were culturally relevant, accessible, and effective within the local context. This balance – between drawing from global knowledge and respecting cultural nuances – has become a guiding principle in my work.

Can you provide an example of a cultural difference and how you adapted your approach?

One example that stands out is when I was developing the child protection and safeguarding policies. Unlike many other countries, Pakistan does not have a formal child protection system, which makes responding to disclosures of abuse that occur in the home environment significantly more complex. In many places, concerns about a child’s safety could be reported directly to a child protection system or law enforcement, but in Pakistan, this wasn’t a viable option in most cases.

Recognising this gap, I had to find an alternative, culturally relevant approach to ensure children’s safety. Given that close relationships with extended family are common in Pakistan, we decided to tap into the child’s extended family network wherever possible. If a child disclosed abuse at home, we would identify other trusted adults within their family or community who could step in and provide protection. By working collaboratively with these adults, we were able to create a more effective and culturally appropriate safeguarding system that prioritised the child’s wellbeing while navigating the existing limitations.

Tell me a little about you, what do you like to do outside of work?

I have a huge travel bug and a deep love for food, so exploring new countries, cultures, and cuisines are my greatest joys. I also love sunsets and coffee so wherever I go, I’m always on the lookout for the perfect sunset spot and the cosiest coffee shop to soak it all in!

Do you have any future aspirations that you would like to share?

My dream is to one day create a comprehensive child and youth services centre – a one-stop hub offering a range of essential services, including speech therapy, occupational therapy, psychological assessments, and psychotherapy under one roof. I envision a space where children, teens, and their families can easily access the support they need, breaking down barriers to care and fostering long-term wellbeing.

In addition, I am considering further studies in the field of mental health advocacy and policy, with the goal of working at a policy level to drive systemic change. I want to help shape child and youth mental health initiatives on a broader scale, ensuring that services are not only available but also accessible, equitable, and tailored to the diverse needs of young people.



At the launch event of the Wellbeing Department at a school in Karachi

Research roundup

In this section, you'll find recent research papers published by our alumni. It's inspiring to see our former students continue to grow as investigative experts in their fields. If you have authored a paper or are involved in research you would like to share with our community, we would love to hear from you. Email us at: alumni@annafreud.org

Anxiety and neural correlates of attention and self-regulation in pregnancy: a resting-state EEG study

PubMed, February 2025

Josephine Levy, Tal Yatziv, Madison Bunderson, Cody Bartz, Emily Vancor, Helena Rutherford

Many women experience anxiety during pregnancy and this can be divided into two parts: general anxiety (worries that the general population might experience) and pregnancy-related anxiety (concerns about the baby, childbirth, and the future). Pregnant women also often report attentional and control issues managing their emotions. This study looked at how anxiety in pregnancy affects the brain, specifically how it is linked to attention and self-regulation. Using a sample of 135 women in the third trimester of their pregnancy, researchers used a brain scan method called electroencephalography (EEG) to measure neural oscillations in relation to different types of anxiety.

The study found that general anxiety was linked to more beta oscillations in the brain; a sign of being alert or hyperarousal. In contrast, pregnancy-related anxiety was linked to decreased beta oscillations, suggesting a lack of focus or mind-wandering. Interestingly, pregnancy-related anxiety was also connected to stronger delta-beta coupling, which may indicate that more effort is required to stay regulated.

The research findings conclude that general and pregnancy-related anxiety may differentially relate to neural patterns underlying attention and self-regulation in pregnancy; suggesting they affect the brain in different ways.



A Theory-Building Case Study of Resolving Epistemic Mistrust and Developing Epistemic Trust in Psychotherapy with Depressed Adolescents

Psychotherapy Research, March 2025 (online)

Elizabeth Li, Nick Midgley, Chloe Campbell & Patrick Luyten

Patients with epistemic mistrust often doubt others can provide helpful or reliable information, which makes it hard for them to benefit from social interactions or therapy. This study focuses on the three communication systems theory which purports that trust grows when: the therapist communicates in a way that the patient can understand and accept (epistemic match); the patient gets better at understanding what others think and feel (mentalizing); and the patient starts to learn and grow from social experiences outside of therapy (social learning).

The aim of the study is to empirically examine the theory to understand how epistemic trust develops in psychotherapy. Researchers analysed recordings from 66 therapy sessions with six teenagers experiencing depression to identify patterns which revealed some interesting findings. They found that when therapists were able to connect with patients in the right way early on, it encouraged patients to become more open. The research also identified the following: what happens in the patients' lives outside of therapy is an influential factor; and that therapist and patient both play active roles in shaping the process.

This study refines the theoretical understanding of epistemic trust in psychotherapy, revealing specific therapist and patient behaviours that may facilitate its development, to better support young people struggling to trust others.



Training, events and offers

We run a variety of courses and webinars, many of which may be relevant to your field of work. To see the full range of training courses – some of which are free, [visit our training and events pages](#). We also have a wealth of resources that you can download from our website.

New distance learning course: MSc/PG Dip/PG Cert in Psychology and Trauma

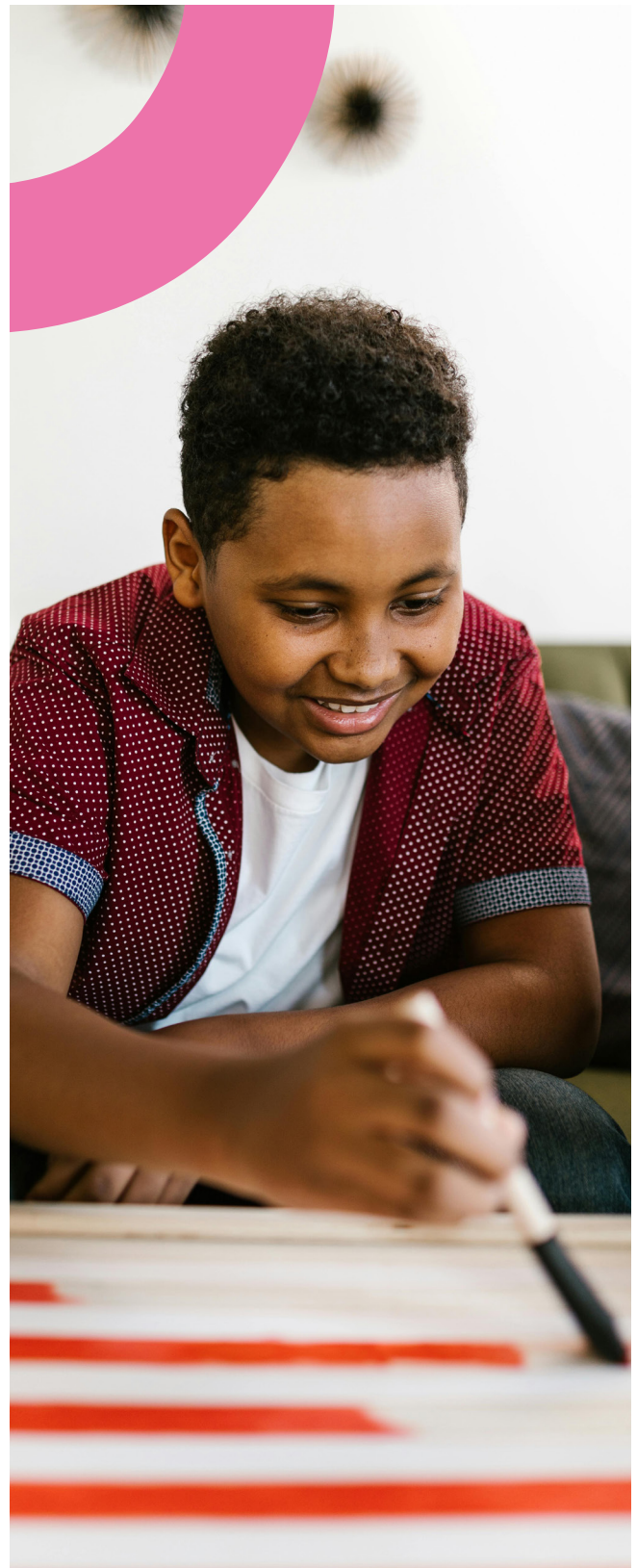
Are you or a colleague currently working or hoping to work with children, young people and families who have experienced adversity?

Or do you – or someone in your network – have an interest in learning more about mental health and require a flexible, self-paced learning opportunity to fit around your professional commitments?

If you answered yes to the above questions, then UCL's innovative new distance learning MSc in Psychology and Trauma could be for you. The course covers content related to the psychology and neuroscience of child and adolescent wellbeing, with a particular focus on understanding the impact of early trauma and adversity.

Starting in September 2025, students will explore cutting-edge research and applied practice, beginning with foundational trauma theory before advancing into specialised modules tailored to their preferred pathway.

Taught by leading academics and clinicians, students can choose between the Adult Route led by UCL, or the Child & Adolescent Route led by both UCL and Anna Freud. Applications are now open for both routes of this fully online programme, which offers multiple qualification levels (MSc, PG Dip or PG Cert) and can be completed full or part-time.



Whether prospective students are interested in trauma-informed care, therapeutic approaches, or the neuroscience of trauma responses, our comprehensive curriculum provides the advanced knowledge and skills needed to make a meaningful impact in this critical field.

Dr Jodie Rawlings is the clinical Co-Director for the MSc in Psychology and Trauma (Child & Adolescent Route). She is a clinical psychologist by training and also works part time within the NHS, allowing her to offer real-life experience to the students.

Dr Rawlings shared her perception of the course: “We are so excited to open this new programme to applications. We are combining best practice in distance learning with recognition of the importance of connection and networking, using a cohort-based model. The course draws on the most up-to-date and exciting evidence in the field of psychology and trauma from across a broad spectrum of research, clinical practice and lived experience. We take a multiple perspectives approach, which allows us to explore lots of ways of understanding the challenges that children and young people face.”

Explore the Programme and please share this opportunity with your colleagues and network!





Anna Freud