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Staff in the Staff Counselling Service

Head of University Counselling Service

Mark Phippen  BACP Senior Reg. Practitioner

Senior Counsellor

Jill Collins  BACP Senior Reg. Practitioner
Accredited Cognitive Analytic Practitioner

Counsellors

Alison Gibson (part-time .5)  BACP Reg. Practitioner
Sarah Parkin (part-time .5)  BACP Senior Reg. Practitioner
Rosemary Parkinson (part-time .5)  BACP Senior Reg. Practitioner
Jane Qualtrough (locum 8 hrs a week)  BACP Senior Reg. Practitioner
Diana Shave (locum 8 hours a week)

Associate Counsellors (training placements: half- to one day per week)

1st year: Lucy Attwood
1st year Jayne Morris [post qualified]
2nd year: Jasna Levinger-Goy

Support Staff (shared with Student Counselling Service)

Sue Geeson  Office Manager
Hazel Sanderson (part-time)  Administrator / Receptionist
Chrissy Spriggs (part-time)  Administrator / Receptionist
Jo Whittington (part-time)  Administrator / Receptionist
Sam Wenham (part-time)  Computing Officer
Robert Smith (part-time)  Financial Administrator
Introduction: 2011/12

The Staff Counselling Service offers a broad range of support and therapy to staff of the University across the spectrum of prevention, support, counselling and personal development. As well as the core work of individual and couples counselling, this has included consultancy to managers, Human Resources and Occupational Health staff, and through collaboration with Personal and Professional Development, workshops and training sessions.

In 2011/12:
- The Service offered counselling to 377 staff, who were seen an average of 6.2 times
- There was an 16% increase in applications for counselling
- The Service saw over 4% of the University staff
- In addition to individual counselling, the Service offered 2 Mindfulness Workshops, 1 Well-being at Work workshop, 6 courses with PPD, and 5 Reflective Practice groups and 5 Laughter Drop-in workshops
- 37 staff attended 97 group sessions
- Approximately 76 individual counselling sessions were offered each week
- A research project on the effectiveness of workplace counselling was completed and a paper published in June 2012.
- In November 2011 The Staff Counselling Service was awarded an Excellence Award [Research] by the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy [BACP] for this work.
- The research was presented at the BACP Research Conference in May 2012

Accountability

Clinical Responsibility

The service works within the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy's 'Ethical Framework'. This provides professional guidance on ethical clinical practice.

Counselling is an emotionally demanding job. Therefore it is a professional requirement for accredited / registered counsellors to have professional clinical supervision of their practice. We are fortunate to have the continuing services of a number of highly experienced clinical supervisors: Jenny Corrigall, Mabel Martinelli, Kathy Mitchell and Michelle Reynolds. Between them they provided professional support and consultation to the staff counsellors.

Human Resources Division

The Staff Counselling Service sits within two different management areas. It is part of the University Counselling Service where its work is overseen by Mark Phippen, Head of Counselling, and managed by Jill Collins, the Senior Staff Counsellor. Jill Collins is a member of the UCS Senior Management Team, working with the Student Service Senior Counsellors under Mark Phippen's lead. However, the two services are funded differently; the Staff Service is Chest funded, whereas the Student Service is mainly financed by the Colleges.

In the 2008 reorganisation of the Human Resources Division, the Staff Counselling Service was placed within the formal structure of the Human Resources Division. Jill Collins is part of the HR Senior Management Team, and attends monthly meetings with Indi Seehra, Director of HR, to discuss the work of the Staff Counselling Service. An Annual Report is prepared for the November meeting of the HR Committee each year.
University Student Counselling Service

The University Student Counselling Service is housed in the same premises and is available to all students of the University.

This Service is also overseen by the Head of Service, Mark Phippen, but is separated administratively and financially from our work with staff. The work of the Student Counselling Service is reported in its own Annual Report to its Executive Committee; the work and figures mentioned in this Report therefore relate solely to our work with staff who hold a University contract of employment.

Health & Safety

During the year the Service’s Health & Safety Committee has continued to oversee risk assessments with the Service, with particular emphasis on preventing physical attacks or other threats to Service staff, especially our reception staff.

Counselling Work

Individual counselling

This year the Service saw a large increase of 18% in applications for individual and couple counselling. This resulted in lengthy waiting times in the Michaelmas term, when there was also staff illness. It was possible to use reserves to employ 2 experienced locum counsellors familiar with our work for 8 sessions each a week until June 2012. This helped to reduce the waiting list but continued steady demand throughout the year has kept it at a constant 20+ staff. There was concern that this would increase unduly over the summer when the appointments available would reduce considerably once the Locum and Associate counsellors finished working in June, and the Staff Counsellors took Annual Leave. We were very grateful that Indi Seehra agreed funding for a further 3 months of 5 extra sessions a week, to be provided by Sarah Parkin over Michaelmas Term 2012.

Waiting times averaged 20 working days to a first session, 4 weeks, an increase from 11 days in the previous year. Some clients waited less time than this, but waits longer than 4 weeks could also often be because a particular appointment time was requested, so availability was restricted. Clients received an average of 6 sessions.

The increase seems due to a number of factors. Many G.P. practices in Cambridge and surrounding areas have closed their counselling provision as a result of the proposed changes and cuts in NHS funding, and are directing their patients who work for the University to our Service. It could also be due to the impact of the loss of staff in departments through the VSS scheme, which has increased the workload of remaining staff who feel under increased pressure. There has also been an increase in staff feeling bullied or harassed by colleagues or managers coming to see us. In addition, the current difficult financial climate has put pressure on family circumstances and relationships, often when a partner has been made redundant.

Staff clients present to the Counselling Service with a wide range of concerns. Usually there is an immediate concern which brings them, but underlying this usually are other issues, and these are very likely to affect both the client’s work and personal life; a client’s work is nearly always affected by their problem even if this is described as being centred on their personal life. Mental health difficulties are a continuum with the overwhelming majority of people at the less severe end in terms of psychiatric diagnosis, but at this point someone will be struggling with many aspects of their daily life, including work, and this is often the point at which they seek or are referred for counselling. Specific reasons which bring clients to the Service involve concerns more directly connected to work such as...
bullying or harassment, difficulty with a colleague, loss of motivation/confidence or settling into a new job, and also personal issues such as relationship difficulties or bereavement.

The Staff Counsellors are experienced in offering time-limited work, and offer flexibility in the timing and frequency of sessions and appropriate therapy for a particular client’s needs, ever mindful of the tension between resources and offering professional ethical work which is effective. Our approach is supported by the results of our research project [details below] that demonstrated that with an average of 7.5 sessions, clients improved to ‘normal’ levels of well-being, and this was still maintained 6 months after the last session.

There was also some change in the incidence of problems about which staff came to seek help. Work problems, relationship issues, anxiety and depression all remain the most common reasons for coming to counselling. However, with work issues, we have noticed an increase in staff who feel under immense pressure from their workload, possibly because of reduced staffing in their department due to budget cuts and staff loss through the VSS scheme. One client described this as being ‘expected to work like a machine.’

**Placements for Associate Counsellors**

Each year we offer placements to a number of Associate counsellors, who are trainees in the late stages of their professional counselling or psychotherapy training. Their work is carefully supervised by the Senior Counsellor and undertaken within professional guidelines on the use of trainee staff; clients can request not to be seen by an Associate if they would prefer.

Lucy Attwood and Jayne Morris joined the team at the start of the year, and Jasna Levinger-Goy continued for a second year in the Service. We believe that this programme benefits both the Service, by bringing in fresh ideas and energy, and the trainees, who experience working in a highly professional service.

**Workshops**

In previous years we offered Well-Being At Work workshops. These were seemingly popular and were fully booked very quickly, but we had a continual difficulty with on-the-day and literally last minute cancellations, without enough notice to offer places to staff on a waiting list, leaving us without a sufficient number to run a useful workshop. Feedback from the participants who did attend was extremely positive so we changed the programme and method of delivery which has been successful. Alison Gibson offered a half-day Working on Well-being session at the UCS, Sarah Parkin facilitated 2 half-day linked Mindfulness sessions twice, held at the Merton Hall Farmhouse, and Rosemary Parkinson ran a half-hour lunchtime drop-in Laughter Club to be held at the University Social Club in Mill Lane. These sessions were bookable through PPD.

The Laughter Club was poorly attended so this will no longer be offered. Merton Hall Farmhouse proved to be an excellent venue and environment for our work and all our workshops will be there in the coming year. We are grateful to the University Chaplaincy for sharing this with us.

**Reflective Practice**

Reflective Practice groups offer a group of staff in a similar role an opportunity to reflect on their role and their work in a safe and facilitating environment, by sharing problematic issues and how these affect them personally. This work began in 2002 and has developed in subsequent years. We now offer monthly sessions for 2 groups of Departmental Administrators, for the Dignity@Work Contacts, the University Mediators, and the Human Resource Advisors, and 2 groups are run for College Nurses on a fee income basis.
Staff Development

We have continued to offer courses for PPD. The previous 2 day ‘Stress, Relaxation and Coping’ course was evaluated and revised to a new 1 day format, now taught by 2 tutors and able to offer 20 places. This was very successful and was run 3 times, fully booked each time with a waiting list.

The ‘Key Listening Skills’ course was offered as a 4-week course twice, taught by Sarah Parkin. We co-facilitated ‘Stress: a Manager’s Responsibility’ with Occupational Health and the Safety Office on two occasions. We also staffed information stalls at the Welcome to the University event, and the New Research Staff induction.

Staff Counselling also contributed to the People Matter Day with a staffed display, and relaxation and laughter sessions were offered, but not run, through lack of response.

Preventative & Outreach Work

Most of this report focuses on the face-to-face work we undertake with staff, whether individually, or in groups or training. The Staff Counselling Service is part of a complementary network of staff support systems that include the Occupational Health and Safety Division, the Human Resources Division, Equality and Diversity, and the University Chaplain. These people are all in the front line of staff support, and we work in a collaborative way with them, aware of our different but mutually supportive roles. We meet termly in the Staff Support Services meeting where common themes and issues arising with staff can be shared and possible joint responses developed. In the past year a common system of collecting data on Staff Stress was begun and is currently being evaluated. This collaboration is important to us and helps to ensure that coherent and ‘joined-up’ support is offered to staff. The direct referral system with Occupational Health and Human Resources has worked well, and enabled the 3 services to directly refer a member of staff, with their signed permission, to one of the teams. 29 clients were referred from Occupational Health and 7 by Human Resources teams.

Staff in the Service are active members of national committees. Jill Collins is a member of the Executive Committee of BACP Workplace, a division of the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) relating to staff counselling. Rosemary Parkinson is involved with the Association for Cognitive Analytic Therapy (ACAT), and Sarah Parkin joined the Staff Counselling Specialist Interest Group of another BACP division, the Association for University and College Counselling. Through this work we are able to both stay in touch with what is happening elsewhere as well as have a voice at a national level.

The Service website (www.counselling.cam.ac.uk) contains information and booklists on everything from reducing levels of anxiety or dealing with procrastination, to strategies for departments in supporting staff following a traumatic incident. The site receives about 1,000 page-views per day.

Research Project

Our subjective assessment as counsellors, and our clients’ comments to us and in our ongoing evaluation of client views on their counselling, tells us that clients benefit from the counselling they receive: they resolve their difficulties; they are helped to process challenging emotional experiences; they work more effectively. The data we already collect on the severity of distress at the start and end of counselling shows that the level of distress improves noticeably, and in our client satisfaction evaluation, completed after the end of counselling, the majority of clients report that their ability to deal with their problem, and to work more effectively, has improved. We were interested to know whether this lessening of distress is maintained over time.
We decided we would like to research this and a project to produce practice-based evidence was begun on 1 August 2009 and ran for a year until 31 July 2010 when the last data subjects were enrolled. We used the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS) suggested to us by Dr. Felicity Huppert of the University Well-being Institute. We invited all clients during the year to complete a questionnaire at the beginning and end of counselling, and at a 3 and 6 months following and we recruited a control group from the staff body to provide a point of comparison. Data from enrolled subjects was completed in Dec 2010.

We were successful in our bid for a BACP Seed Corn Research Grant, which was supported by BACP Workplace. This enabled us to engage the help of an experienced statistician in psychological research to analyse the data. The team worked together to produce a research paper which was submitted to the Counselling and Psychotherapy Research journal, and, following Peer Review, was accepted for publication in July 2012. An article was written on the project which was published in the Autumn 2011 editions of Counselling@Work, the journal of BACP Workplace.

This research showed clearly that counselling can enable distressed clients to acquire an increased sense of well-being in that there was:

- Significant statistical difference between pre- and post-counselling treatment group scores on the WEMWBS with consistently higher scores found at post-counselling and maintained at 3 and 6 month follow up.
- An effect size of 1.3, above the recognised threshold for significant change in counselling-related measures (McLeod, 2001).
- A magnitude of change above a statistically significant threshold in almost 70% of clients in the treatment group.

A comparison of the client group’s WEMWBS scores with those of the small un-counselled group also shows the former group to be much less ‘well’ than the latter before counselling occurs, but that once counselling sessions have ended the difference between them has virtually disappeared. The benefits of counselling appear to be maintained for at least the six months after counselling ends.

This piece of research has raised considerable interest and several Staff Counsellors in other HE institutions are now beginning very similar projects based on our own. In May 2012 Jill Collins and Colin Dyer, the statistician who did the data analysis, attended the BACP Research Conference in Edinburgh and presented the research at a workshop.

Mark Phippen, Head of Service, nominated this piece of research work for a BACP Excellence Award in Research and we were successful in being awarded this. Mark Phippen and Alison Gibson attended the Award Ceremony in London in November 2011 and were presented with the award by Ruby Wax.

**Client Satisfaction Survey**

We are interested to find out how clients view their experience of counselling, and how effective they feel it has been in helping them resolve their difficulties. We use an online service hosted by ‘SurveyMonkey’, which processes the responses and configures the data for us. An email invitation is sent to clients when counselling is completed, giving a web link to the evaluation questionnaire and we received a 51% response rate.

Many clients take this opportunity to comment on their personal experience of counselling. They commented on the Service’s professionalism, welcoming approach and how they feel they were helped. The comments were mostly very encouraging, and revealed high levels of satisfaction with staff clients’ experience of the Service. Adverse comments, as always, were about the waiting time which was felt to be too long, and too few sessions to feel that they had properly dealt with their difficulties.
• 45% found filling in the Pre-counselling form ‘thought provoking’, and 34% found it easy to complete; 10% found it difficult
• 99% were satisfied with the Reception area and staff
• 100% found the waiting room private and comfortable
• 32% were offered an appointment within a week, and 31% waited 2-3 weeks. 47% were ‘fine’ about this, and 37% ‘mostly OK’, but 13% were upset about the time they had to wait. This is an increase from 6% last year, reflecting the longer waits this year.
• 63% said that their work was adversely affected by their difficulties
• 82% said counselling had enabled them to stay at work
• 83% said counselling helped them work better
• 20% felt that they had had too few sessions

Many write of the ‘tremendous difference’ their counselling made to them, how helpful it was, and of their appreciation of the University as their employer in providing it. They felt valued and respected during the counselling process, and appreciated the provision of a confidential space in which to address their difficulties. A significant number of respondents, 20%, commented that they wished that their counselling could have been for longer, and whilst some understood that resources mean that our work has to be time-limited, others felt strongly that they had needed more time to really overcome their difficulties and that this should be provided.

Priorities for 2012/13

1 Continue to consider the most effective and efficient means for delivering counselling support to staff at a time of budget reductions and a growing waiting list, whilst maintaining best and ethical practice.
2 Monitor and evaluate the use of the service and knowledge of it amongst the whole staff body.
3 Make an application in the RAM in Michaelmas Term 2012 for additional staffing from Sept 2013.

Jill Collins
Senior Staff Counsellor
October 2012