

# BACP Workplace

For therapists working with employees, employers and EAPs

Issue 111 January 2022

**Behind the  
line of duty**  
Page 8



*'Burnout rates in police officers are high, not only due to cutbacks and a lack of resources, but also from undertaking work that continuously exposes them to traumatic events'*

POLICE

# Contents

## FEATURES

### 8

#### The issue: *Working with the police*

The public's love of TV police dramas may distort our understanding of what it means to work in policing. **Zoe Davenport** uncovers a less well-known story and argues that those who protect our society deserve a properly funded national standard of clinical support



### 14

#### The interview: *My workplace*

**Naomi Ward** talks to **Nicola Banning** about her work coaching educators and why she believes that education needs positive disruptors to create change



*BACP Workplace* is the quarterly journal of BACP Workplace, a division of the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP). It is published by BACP, 15 St John's Business Park, Lutterworth, LE17 4HB.

T 01455 883300

#### Membership and subscriptions

*BACP Workplace* is distributed free of charge to its members. For membership or subscription queries, please contact Customer Services at BACP on 01455 883300 or email [workplace@bacp.co.uk](mailto:workplace@bacp.co.uk)

#### Editor

**Nicola Banning**  
[workplaceeditor@bacp.co.uk](mailto:workplaceeditor@bacp.co.uk)

#### Contributions

Contributions are welcomed. Please contact [workplaceeditor@bacp.co.uk](mailto:workplaceeditor@bacp.co.uk) For contributors' guidelines, see [www.bacp.co.uk/bacp-journals/author-guidelines/](http://www.bacp.co.uk/bacp-journals/author-guidelines/)

#### Advertising

For rates, contact **Sonal Mistry**  
T 0203 771 7200  
[sonal.mistry@thinkpublishing.co.uk](mailto:sonal.mistry@thinkpublishing.co.uk)  
Publication of advertisements in *BACP Workplace* does not constitute endorsement by BACP Workplace or BACP.

#### Design

**Steers McGillan Eves**  
T 01225 465546

#### Print

**Hobbs the Printers Ltd**  
T 023 8066 4800

#### Case studies

All case studies in this journal, whether noted individually or not, are permissioned, disguised, adapted or composites, with all names and identifying features changed, in order to ensure confidentiality.

Front cover: library pictures, for illustration

### 22

#### When 'old Mark' meets 'new Mark'

How can we best support workplace clients who are experiencing long COVID? **Anupama Garg** shares her learning



### 30

#### Books

Have you figured out what you're here to do? **Eloise Skinner** talks to **Nicola Banning** about her new book, *The Purpose Handbook*



## REGULARS

### 3

#### First words

**Nicola Banning**  
What am I here for?

### 4

#### News from BACP Workplace

#### Copyright

Apart from fair dealing for the purposes of research or private study, or criticism or review, as permitted under the UK Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1998, no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored or transmitted in any form by any means without the prior permission in writing of the publisher, or in accordance with the terms of licences issued by the Copyright Clearance Centre (CCC), the Copyright Licensing Agency (CLA), and other organisations authorised by the publisher to administer reprographic reproduction rights. Individual and organisational members of BACP only may make photocopies for teaching purposes free of charge, provided such copies are not resold.

## COLUMNS

13

**Cyberwork****Sarah Worley-James**

Can we create certainty in an uncertain world?

20

**Race matters****Letesia Gibson**

How damaging is doing nothing when it comes to creating anti-racist workplaces?

27

**Workplace matters****Sandi Mann**

Why do we panic buy?

28

**Q&A**

Where does clinical responsibility lie?

**Josephine Bey** and **Denise Ela May**

respond to a member's question and turn to the Workplace Counselling Competence Framework for guidance

**First Words****What am I here for?**

**W**hat is my purpose? It's a question often asked at times of personal or professional change. For those with a calling or vocation – teachers, doctors, therapists, the police and emergency responders, the answer might simply be, 'to teach, heal, care or help'. But when we lose our sense of purpose, we become disconnected and lose a part of our self. This is often precisely the moment in a client's life when we meet them for the first time.

Zoe Davenport leads a national police psychological health surveillance programme and writes this issue's lead article on working with the police. She describes the force as 'the punchbags of society', and her article makes for sobering reading: 'I have worked with police officers who have been stabbed or shot, run over, or had their jaw or limbs broken; and most horrifically, set on fire.' Little wonder that Zoe argues for a properly funded national standard of clinical support for the police – which begs the question, why isn't it already in place?

The answer, unlikely to surprise anyone working with the public sector, appears to lie in chronic underfunding and a lack of staff and resources. This makes tough work even tougher and it lowers morale. Not only are police officers retiring earlier because they are no longer able to endure a 30-year career physically or mentally, but the OH staff who support them are in short supply, and few 'helpers' are drawn to work in a staff service so starved of investment.

It got me thinking about the wounds inflicted on employees, who become fodder for political distraction or expediency – from the GPs being told to 'stop hiding' by Sajid Javid, the Health Secretary, to the teachers accused of being idle during lockdown. On page 14, in 'My workplace', I talk to Naomi Ward, a former English teacher, who coaches educators across the world to rediscover their sense of purpose. I was touched to learn how Naomi offers her love of language and metaphor to help those who can't put words to what they have lost: 'When we can't find the words to express something that we are longing for, we find that the poets have already said it.' This, Naomi says, helps us to transcend the fear that we are alone – the connection reassures us and it gives us courage.

In 'When "old Mark" meets "new Mark"', Anupama Garg explains that she was unable to find a single case study written by a workplace counsellor on their work with an employee experiencing long COVID. This gave her a sense of purpose to write one, and you can find it on page 22. And finally, if you or your clients need reacquainting with your sense of purpose, I hope you'll read my interview with Eloise Skinner about her new book, *The Purpose Handbook*.

**Nicola Banning**  
Editor, BACP Workplace  
workplaceeditor@bacp.co.uk

*'Over the years, educators have also been vilified in the press, most recently for laziness when they worked from home during the pandemic. This matters and it's hurtful'*

Page 12

©British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy 2022  
ISSN (print): 2516-0796  
ISSN (online): 2516-080X

**Privacy**

In our author guidelines, we set out how we will help protect the privacy and confidentiality of any personal information used. For more details, please visit our privacy notice on BACP's website: [www.bacp.co.uk/privacy-notice](http://www.bacp.co.uk/privacy-notice)







## Notes from the Chair

# *Times are changing*



**'I can't stress enough the need for good-quality supervision with a supervisor who is experienced in workplace supervision, to ensure that you are fully supported in your clinical work'**

**Julie Hughes**

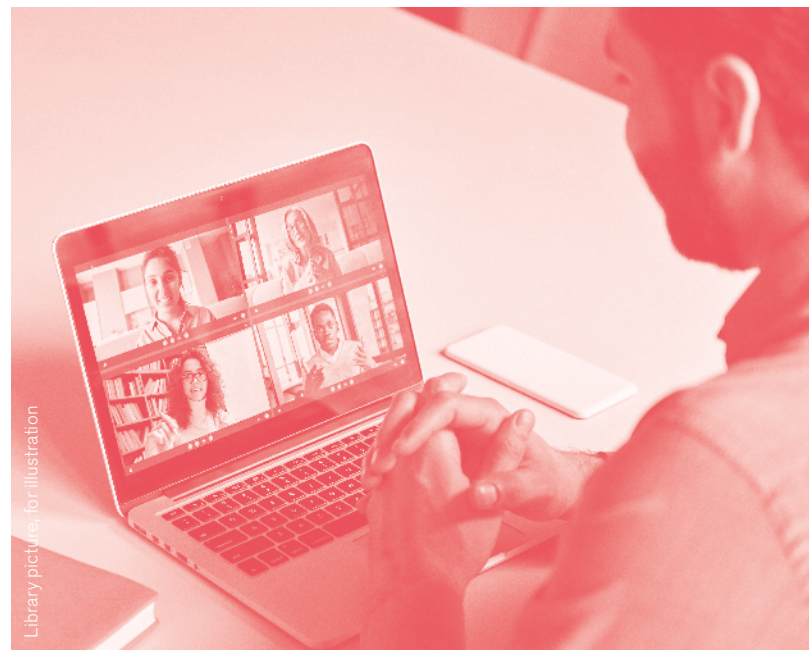
I'm aware that as we head into 2022, it will be the third year in which coronavirus has been a real and present part of all our lives. I don't know about you, but it's not the kind of anniversary that I want to mark, and I admit that the end of 2021 has felt rather unsettled on many fronts. Wearing my workplace counsellor hat, I'm conscious that there is an ambient stress that has become normal for so many employees across industry, who are prone to exhaustion and burnout. It's something that our profession must be ever mindful of, as I'm hearing of colleagues who are finding the demand for counselling arising from the fallout of the pandemic to be relentless. The workplace setting can be a complex one for the therapist to negotiate, particularly when demands for therapy are increasing, and so I can't stress enough the need for good-quality supervision with a supervisor who is experienced in workplace supervision, to ensure that you are fully supported in your clinical work.

### Join our networking sessions

I'm delighted that the virtual networking meetings, which were launched last year, have been really well received by BACP Workplace members. Looking ahead, the plan is to offer a virtual space, where workplace therapists can connect with fellow practitioners on the second Thursday of every other month. The next meeting will take place on Thursday 10 March, from 4pm to 6pm. You can find out more, and sign up if you wish to attend, here: [www.bacp.co.uk/events/nmw1111-bacp-workplace-network-meeting/](http://www.bacp.co.uk/events/nmw1111-bacp-workplace-network-meeting/) The topic for the last meeting was the lack of mental health provision in the NHS and how it impacts on workplace counselling services.

### Workplace Counselling Competence Framework

As I reflect on the work of the BACP Workplace Executive Committee, the launch of the Workplace Counselling Competence Framework was certainly something to be very proud of last year. It finally came to fruition after several years and is a gold standard for workplace practitioners. I'm interested to hear from members who have raised queries about the framework, and we will continue to address some of these broad themes in our Q&A in *BACP Workplace*. My thanks to BACP Workplace Executive Committee members Josephine Bey and Denise Ela May for responding to questions of risk management on page 28.



Library pictures, for illustration



**Julie Hughes, Chair BACP Workplace**  
juliehughes@mindmatterscounselling.org.uk

### Farewell to Nick Wood

I'm not sure that the Workplace Counselling Competence Framework would have been possible without the incredible energy, commitment and expertise of Nick Wood, who helped to push it all the way to the finishing line. So, I'm sorry to announce that Nick decided to step down from his place on the Executive Committee in October, after more than 10 years of exceptional service. We will all miss Nick's wealth of experience and commitment to the division and, on behalf of the Executive Committee, I would like to take this opportunity to thank Nick for his valuable contributions to our sector.

### Future planning

I'm thrilled to hear that, once again, Kris Ambler, BACP's Workforce Lead, has arranged for BACP to be one of the sponsors of the Health and Wellbeing at Work event at the NEC, from 15 to 16 March, so I do hope you will make a note of the date for your diary.

You may recall that, last issue, I wrote with the good news that Vianna Boring will be taking on the role of co-Chair this year. I'm delighted to be working closely with Vianna as she settles into her role as co-Chair and as I hand over the reins to her. In the meantime, if there's something on your mind that you would like to let me know about, as always, I'd love to hear from you. Please do drop me a line at the email above. ●



## A second pandemic for UK farmers

Over the last two years, BACP has been working closely with a network of rural support organisations, including counselling services, charities and universities, to better understand the mental health needs of farm workers.

In October, we were invited to the launch of the Royal Agricultural Benevolent Institution (RABI) Big Farming Survey, undertaken on its behalf by academics from the Centre for Rural Policy Research at the University of Exeter.

Their findings reveal the scale of the mental health pandemic in UK farming, with some groups – including women farmers – disproportionately affected by both the COVID pandemic and wider pressures on farming. During this time,

BACP has worked closely with RABI to help shape a new face-to-face counselling service available to farmers working in England.

The service launches in January 2022 and will be free at the point of delivery, funded by RABI, and delivered entirely by BACP therapists working for a member organisation, Red Umbrella. The service has seen Red Umbrella take on 20 new therapists, all of whom will receive on-board training, which includes a module on working in rural contexts. In the future, the service will be expanded across England and Wales, and BACP will join partners in submitting written evidence to a new House of Commons Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (EFRA) inquiry into rural mental health.

### BACP working across industry

In the last year, we've been focusing our work at a sub-sector level, concentrating resources on a number of priority industries where mental health outcomes are some of the poorest among UK workers. These industries include agriculture, retail, construction and blue-light (emergency) services. In the farming industry, for example, one farmer a week dies by suicide, and a similar pattern exists within construction and the emergency services.

Kris Ambler, BACP's Workforce Lead, explains, 'We've taken a leading role in positioning counselling and psychotherapy within discussions on how to address these mental health inequalities and have worked alongside trade associations, including ACAS, and professional bodies like CIPD, the British Retail Consortium, the Chartered Industry of Building and the Royal Foundation of the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge.'

# BACP works with The Royal Foundation to support emergency responders



**W**e've been working with The Royal Foundation of the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge to create a directory of therapists with the skills, qualifications and experience to work with emergency responders, as part of a wider package of support.

The Royal Foundation is funding the creation of the Blue Light Together Network of Emergency Services Therapists (NEST), which will be made available to all those in need of support via referral partners, including the charity Police Care UK.

As part of an expert reference group, we're leading on developing a role profile for emergency responder therapists, who will then be listed on the NEST directory. Specialist continuing professional development will also be available to ensure they provide the best possible care to emergency responders. The work is driven by a recognition that traditional employee assistance programme (EAP) services aren't always suitable for some professions.

Kris Ambler, BACP's Workforce Lead, said: 'It's early days in what is an interesting multi-agency project, but we've already made some big strides. Importantly, once the directory is developed, it will help our members achieve parity of esteem with professions that have traditionally dominated this space. These will be paid roles across the UK that reflect the skills, experience and specialism of our members.'

In November, we were invited to attend the official launch of the Blue Light Together package of support. The event, which saw keynote speeches from HRH Prince William, Health Secretary Sajid Javid and the Metropolitan Police Commissioner Dame Cressida Dick, outlined the Foundation's commitment to supporting the mental health needs of emergency responders and highlighted the vital role partners, including BACP, will play in improving mental health outcomes for the 999 community.



## Dates for the diary

### Webcast

#### Queering therapy spaces and working with gender-diverse clients

**Date: 17 February 2022**

This event is for counsellors and psychotherapists who wish to increase their knowledge and understanding around the current best practice for working alongside gender-diverse people.

You can book your place by visiting BACP Events online:

🔗 <https://www.bacp.co.uk/events/owwd1702-queering-therapy-spaces-and-working-with-gender-diverse-clients/>

### Health and Wellbeing at Work conference

**Date: 15 to 16 March**

This year, BACP's Workforce Lead Kris Ambler will speak on supporting the mental health crisis in farming.

Kris will be joined by speakers from the Royal Agricultural Benevolent Institution (RABI), as well as Tim Ladd from Red Umbrella, Dr David Christian Rose of the University of Reading and Elizabeth Creak, Associate Professor of Agricultural Innovation and Extension and Co-Director, Centre for Effective Innovation in Agriculture.

You can access the programme for the conference here:

🔗 [healthwellbeingwork.co.uk/conference-at-a-glance-approval](https://healthwellbeingwork.co.uk/conference-at-a-glance-approval)

🔗 [healthwellbeingwork.co.uk](https://healthwellbeingwork.co.uk)







## Business owners struggle with mental health

In early November, we announced the results of our research which showed nearly all small business owners (96%) admit to keeping the stress of running a business 'bottled up'. Following 18 months of business uncertainty due to the pandemic, the survey we commissioned looks at the mental health of small business owners. The data showed the alarming pressures faced by UK business owners, as nearly two-thirds (63%) admit to prioritising their financial success over their mental health. The overwhelming demands of running a business are prevalent among the 500 surveyed small business owners, with 16% taking personal loans and nearly a quarter (22%) sacrificing friendships, in order to keep their business running.

The biggest business setbacks for SMEs were identified as competition, financial issues and hiring the wrong people. Running a business is stressful, according to 79% of small business owners, and almost one in five (19%) feel like giving up running their business every day. Kris Ambler, BACP's Workforce Lead, who contributed to the research, said: 'We can only imagine how testing the last 18 months have been, especially for small business owners, who have had to adjust to new business challenges. The fact so many business owners have deprioritised their own mental wellbeing in favour of financial matters and business success is alarming. It's important to seek mental health support to prevent business challenges from being overwhelming. This survey highlights the importance of seeking qualified counselling support for small business owners. It may just impact your bottom line.'

## BACP's CPD hub

Don't miss out on over 300 hours of online resources, which you can use towards your CPD requirement. For just £25 per year, you can access content from the CPD hub and enjoy new content that's added monthly, including video recordings and audio files.

**Some of the new content includes:**

### Coaching and the climate crisis

Coaches and therapists are increasingly becoming aware of climate change and its effects on the wider system, on them, personally and professionally. They are asking themselves, what does this mean for me? Linda Aspey discusses the current climate situation and the range of possible responses that therapists and their clients might have.

### Safeguarding and risk management in action

Lynne Gabriel considers risk management and safeguarding in counselling. This is often an area of practice that is most feared. She hopes that this

presentation will support you to prepare for, or develop your approach to, risk management.

### Autism

Consultant psychotherapist Raymi Doyle discusses some of the findings from his doctorate research, 'Bridging the Gap between the Autistic, the Therapist and the Theoretical Perspective'.

### What do we know about doing therapy online?

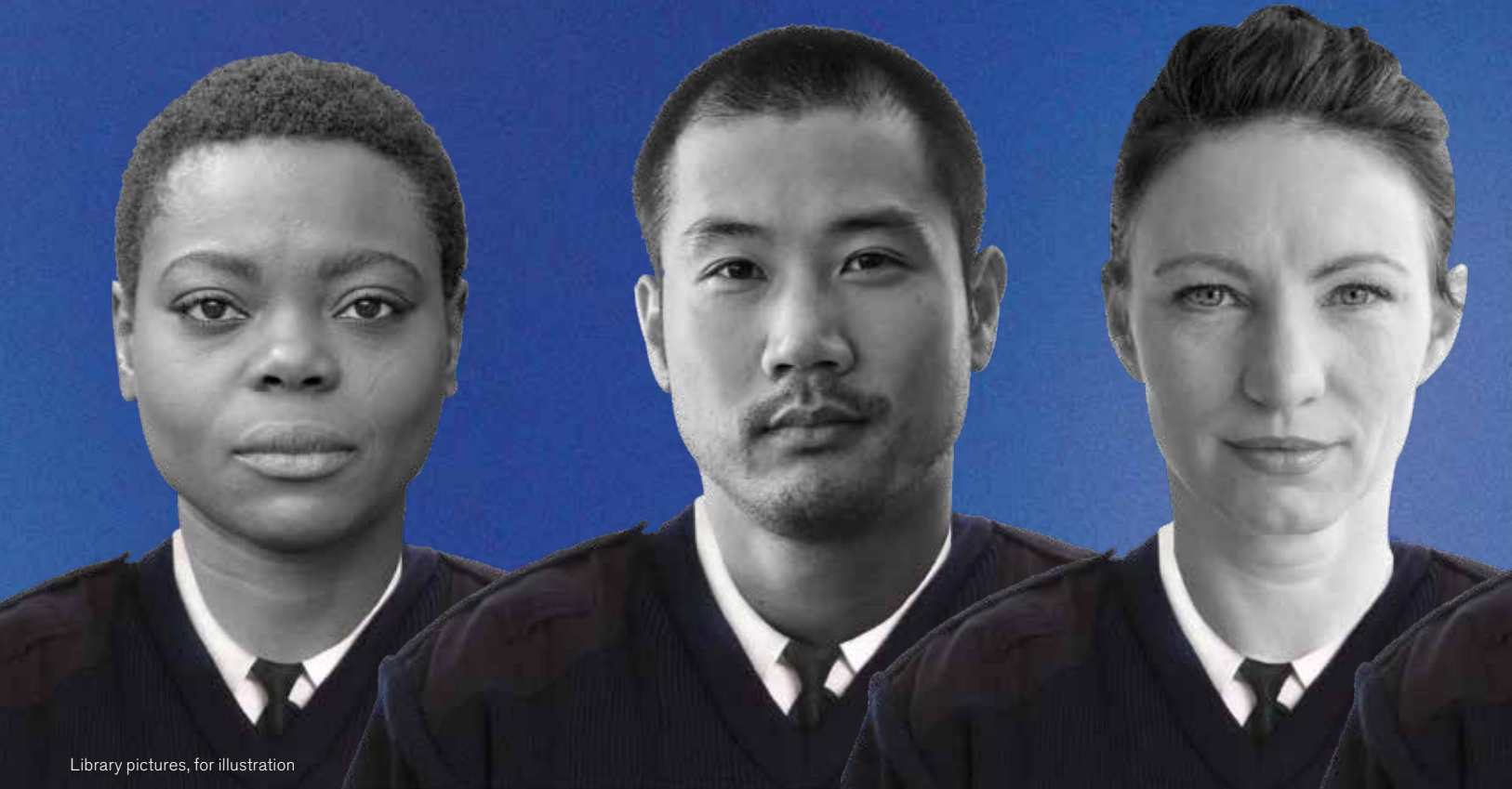
Naomi Moller, Senior Lecturer at The Open University, explores issues surrounding online therapy. Since the pandemic, therapists have moved to deliver online therapy through videoconferencing, audio and even text messaging. However, many therapists have not been trained, and the existing literature on the viability of online therapy raises several important questions around the issues of ethics, the therapeutic relationship and confidentiality.

▶ You can access the CPD hub at: [www.bacp.co.uk/cpd/cpd-hub](http://www.bacp.co.uk/cpd/cpd-hub)



### Feedback

We welcome readers' letters and comments. If you've read something in *BACP Workplace* you would like to comment on, please do get in touch: [workplace@bacp.co.uk](mailto:workplace@bacp.co.uk)



Library pictures, for illustration

# *Working with the police*

The public's love of TV police dramas may distort our understanding of what it means to work in policing.

**Zoe Davenport** uncovers a less well-known story, shedding light on both the brutality, and the humanity she witnesses. She argues that those who protect our society deserve a properly funded national standard of clinical support





**Zoe Davenport** is an integrative humanistic therapist and clinical supervisor specialising in trauma. She has worked for domestic abuse charities, with young people, humanitarian aid workers, commercial organisations and in private practice. Zoe is also a clinical supervisor for NHS occupational health staff.

**I**t's almost impossible for me to describe what I've learnt and the experiences I've had in the last nine years since I've been working with, for or around policing and police officers. What I can say without hesitation is that working with the police is probably the hardest work I have ever done, not only in terms of the content of client material, but also because of the frustrations of working in a service that is chronically underfunded and under-resourced.

I'm writing this article to uncover another side of policing, away from some of the negative narratives, which have been so prevalent. It's about the work that I and my colleagues across policing are providing to support better emotional, psychological and physical wellbeing. The need is great, as the police have become the punchbags of society, caught between decisions made by the Government and an increasingly frustrated society, and yet they are the people we will call when we are in need. They run towards what we run away from.

I first began working in policing when I joined the Metropolitan Police's occupational health (OH) department in 2013 as a staff counsellor. I transitioned from that role in 2017 to run a national police psychological health surveillance

programme, and I now lead a larger version of this as part of the National Police Wellbeing programme, via the College of Policing.

My experience of working with the police, whether as clients or colleagues, has been overwhelmingly positive. I've met some of the kindest, most hardworking people I know, who genuinely care about what they do and who want to do the best for us, despite working under some incredibly difficult conditions. As the saying goes, the police are the public (and the public are the police). They are just like the rest of us, human, fallible, but overall good and caring. And they are often frustrated by the lack of staff and resources. The police suffer the same day-to-day struggles as the rest of us – anxiety, financial worries, relationship breakdowns and family bereavements – and they still go out and deal with some of the worst aspects of humanity on a daily basis.

### **Culture in policing**

That said, I am in no way condoning or excusing some of the behaviour of some officers over recent months, and neither do the vast majority of officers. As with all workplaces, there are some fundamental problems that need to be

addressed, and police organisations are clearly not without issue.

The kidnap, rape and murder of Sarah Everard, by Wayne Couzens, a serving Met police officer has rightly shone a spotlight on policing and raised questions about the culture within it. The horror and sadness felt by the public was also felt across policing, and I know that the desire to restore trust is one of urgency. As a therapist, this resonates with my own experience of working with clients who have had a damaging or unethical experience with another therapist – the actions of one person can reflect badly on the whole of our profession.

### Morale and burnout

Morale in policing, as in other public sector organisations, is low. A high turnover of staff, due to sickness, disillusionment with the role, and changes to pensions, means that new officers no longer see policing as a job for life. A loss of experienced older officers and fewer people doing more work, as a result of repeated cuts to funding greater pressures due to the changing nature of crime, and filling the gaps that other services are no longer able to fill, such as the rise of calls related to mental health, have all impacted on staff morale.

Burnout rates among police officers are high, not only due to cutbacks and a lack of resources, but also from undertaking work that continuously exposes them to traumatic events, whether they be response officers attending incidents multiple times a day, or officers viewing distressing images as part of child abuse investigation teams.

In addition, increasing public scrutiny brings with it additional stress. In my role, I have been filmed by a member of the public when I attended an incident with a policing team, and I can attest that it is both unnerving and intrusive to be filmed while trying to do your job under very difficult circumstances, with no control over where that footage will end up. Police now wear body video cameras in

According to the  
Police Federation<sup>1</sup>  
there are around

# 30,000

assaults on police  
across the country  
every year



that's just under

# 100

officers a day  
(and that's only the  
ones who report it)

order to record incidents, to protect both the public and themselves.

### Assaults and injuries

Policing is a risky business, both physically and mentally. According to the Police Federation,<sup>1</sup> there are around 30,000 assaults on police across the country every year. That's just under 100 officers a day (and that's only the ones who report it).

There is an acceptance that being assaulted is just a part of the job, and it would be unrealistic to expect no injuries, given what policing involves. However, the level of violence experienced, for most of us, would be life changing, whereas for the police, it is normal. I have worked with officers who have been stabbed, or shot, run over, or had their jaw or limbs broken; and, most horrifically, set on fire. Unfortunately, these were not unusual or rare incidents.

### Life stories and suicide

Other factors are the culture and personality types of the people who make up a large proportion of the police force. Policing is a vocation that draws people to the profession to do good and to right wrongs, sometimes stemming from personal experience and adverse childhood experiences – a police version of the wounded healer. As with other vocational and public sector roles, there is a culture of 'keeping on, keeping on', and being affected by your job is to an extent perceived by individuals as a failing or a weakness, often resulting in officers becoming very unwell before coming to therapy. All police departments are overstretched, there is no give, so taking time off work doesn't feel like much of an option because your colleagues will have to take up the slack, and they are overworked too.

The level of suicides in policing is something that I naively did not expect. I have worked with many officers who were struggling with severe mental health issues, and unfortunately officer suicides are not rare events.<sup>2</sup> Historically, forces have not recorded officer suicides, but with the work that is being done to recognise the impact that police work has on mental health, there is now a national programme to record and acknowledge officer suicides.

### Exposure to trauma

The broad range of roles that police undertake, on its own, is something that I think the general public have little idea of. Most of us think of the people in uniform who drive cars with blue lights, attending traffic incidents, burglaries, assaults, robberies, stabbings, shootings and accidents; and while that is a large part of policing, there are also a multitude of other policing roles that go unseen. For example,

there are police who are trained to deal with people who are suicidal or in mental distress, and who do this as a voluntary role on top of their substantive role. Police officers were also the primary responders to deaths at home from COVID-19 during the height of the pandemic, with some officers attending up to 15 deaths in a day.<sup>3</sup>

### TV dramas

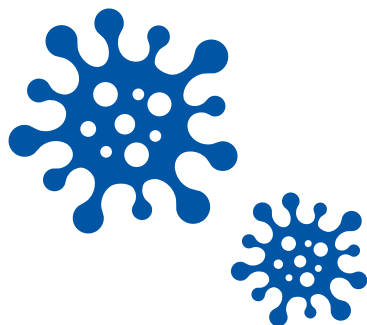
Our love of police dramas, such as *Line of Duty* and *Unforgotten*<sup>4</sup> (the latter having the most realistic representation of the difficulties of medical retirement due to PTSD that I have seen), can give unrealistic expectations of policing, particularly in relation to our expectations of the impact of the work, in that somehow police officers should remain untouched by what they deal with, or because of the stereotype of the hardened cop with a bottle of whisky in his desk drawer. Certainly, when I first joined the Met, I was unprepared for the levels of mental distress, not always from the immediate stress of the job itself, but from the losses, where lives couldn't be saved and where officers felt they had failed, despite going above and beyond to save life in exceptionally difficult circumstances.

So many people I worked with, who had many different lengths of service, had stories of incidents they had attended that stayed with them for years, if not for their whole careers: from the first dead body, or stabbing, to seeing colleagues seriously injured or being injured themselves, and sometimes fearing for their lives. Much of the work I have done, including training around trauma and mental health, has been to normalise responses to traumatic incidents and educate officers that feeling distress is not a failing.

### Systemic change

Having shifted from working with individual police officers therapeutically, my role now is part of a wider national police wellbeing programme that provides guidance,

**‘Police officers were also the primary responders to deaths at home from COVID-19 during the height of the pandemic, with some officers attending up to 15 deaths in a day’<sup>3</sup>**



tools and training for police and OH staff to deal with the complex issues that are specific to policing, such as post-incident and trauma response, or death in service. I lead the programme which supports officers in high-risk roles, such as traffic collision investigators, child abuse investigation teams and firearms officers, who have a higher than average exposure to traumatic events, by providing an annual health surveillance questionnaire, comprising a selection of clinical questionnaires.

It was developed by Dr Noreen Tehrani to capture the particular impact that police work can have early on and prevent more serious, undetected, trauma-related illness from emerging later on. I work with senior police officers, force leads and national groups in 43 police forces that are taking part in the programme.

We currently have funding to support 6,000 officers across the country, and there are always more requests than we are able to provide for. Fortunately, awareness of mental health in policing is growing, and stigma around asking for help is slowly reducing, which, while positive in itself, is highlighting the lack of funding and structured support in policing. As with all other areas, OH is chronically underfunded and overstretched. Some forces have outsourced this provision to EAPs, which can bring its own issues. Gaps in psychological/mental health provisions are often filled by well-meaning but unqualified volunteers. The fashion for wellbeing and mindfulness, while offering useful additional tools, does not provide the structured clinical support that many officers need.

### Occupational health teams

The OH staff who support the police include nurses, psychotherapists, psychiatrists, psychologists, counsellors and medical officers – dedicated professionals, who repeatedly go above and beyond to look after their clients. Many OH staff have backgrounds in the NHS, as nurses or GPs, or are experienced in working in a variety of mental health settings. Experience and training in working with high-level trauma, such as trauma-focused CBT or EMDR, is necessary, as is an ability to work with hard-to-engage clients. Most therapeutic work in policing is short term, often six to 10 sessions, so an ability to work with complex issues in a short-term setting is key. I also think robustness and a strong stomach are requirements. I never considered myself squeamish at all, but I have definitely heard stories that have affected me and will stay with me forever.

Alongside the tragedy of officer suicides, given the dangerous nature of policing, deaths of officers involved in accidents on duty or as victims of



## ‘When there is a death of an officer, I become most aware of the closeness of the “police family” and I find it another unique aspect of working clinically in policing’

murder – such as those of Keith Palmer, Andrew Harper and Matt Ratana – while relatively rare, are not unusual. The impact on colleagues and friends, as well as the wider organisation, is something I have not experienced in other workplaces when someone has died. When there is a death of an officer, I become most aware of the closeness of the ‘police family’ and I find it another unique aspect of working clinically in policing. As a therapist, the risk of losing a client to suicide or injury on duty is very real, and something that I have experienced more than once.

### Under investigation

A large part of therapeutic work with police officers is supporting those who are under investigation. There was a time when these investigations made up about 70% of my overall caseload. Investigations can go on for years, and more often than not, result in no case to answer, causing a huge strain on the officers being investigated, their families and also the wider police workforce as, while under investigation, officers are removed from public-facing roles.

As a therapist, an ability to remain objective when clients and cases are being discussed in the press is needed. I have on more than one occasion opened the news on my phone while travelling home from work and seen articles mentioning clients, which can be frustrating and unnerving.

Regular, high-quality supervision is fundamental, and I also find peer supervision with other therapists working in policing incredibly useful. However, I have found supervision – either individual or peer – with those who don’t have experience in policing, to be counterproductive, as an understanding of the culture is paramount. Towards the end of my time working clinically with officers, I suffered chronic burnout after dealing with high numbers of extreme trauma cases, on top of being part of the response team following the Westminster Bridge attack.

Responding to major incidents, such as the Grenfell Tower fire, the Manchester Arena attack or the London Bridge attacks are also part of the unique work that OH staff undertake, providing post-incident debriefs for those who were involved and ongoing support to those who have been injured or suffered trauma. This can be emotionally

and physically draining, and the sheer scale of need can overwhelm even the most well-staffed departments.

### Closing thoughts

Looking ahead, the OH workforce is an ageing one, with many nurses and counsellors nearing retirement age. It seems that OH work in policing is not a role many people want to undertake, so we are facing a future crisis in staffing, which is concerning.

I believe that, if we expect police to run into danger on a daily basis, in return we have an obligation to mitigate the impact that this role can have by properly funding OH departments, providing a national standard of clinical support to all forces, regardless of size, that would offer post-incident debriefing as standard, alongside quality therapeutic interventions with qualified and experienced staff, and for this to be seen as a basic need, rather than a luxury.

Working in policing is the hardest job I have undertaken so far in my career, not only due to the lack of funding, resources and negative press, but also due to the sheer horror of the work that officers carry out and the effort of trying to support people in such difficult circumstances. However, it has also been the job I have loved most, and I have met some of the most incredible people, who deal with some of the worst aspects of humanity. My desire to provide support for those who protect us has not yet been diminished. There is much work still to do and I am keen to undertake research on the impacts of a 30-year career in policing and how it affects those who do this work, in order to inform how we can better support those who protect us. ●

### REFERENCES

- 1 Police Federation. [Online.] <https://www.polfed.org/news/latest-news/2021/officers-have-a-duty-to-themselves-to-report-every-assault/> (accessed 16 November 2021).
- 2 Office for National Statistics. [Online.] <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/adhoc/009437numberofpoliceofficersthatdiedbysuicideinenglandandwalesages20to642015to2017> (accessed 4 November 2021).
- 3 <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/coronavirus-police-deaths-uk-lockdown-homes-mental-illness-a9459711.html> (accessed 16 November 2021).
- 4 Unforgotten [television programme]. Andy Wilson (dir). ITV 2021; 22 March.

### Your feedback, please

If you have thoughts about any of the issues raised in this article or if you would like to write an article of your own, we would like to hear from you. Please email the editor: [workplaceditor@bacp.co.uk](mailto:workplaceditor@bacp.co.uk)

## Cyberwork

# Can we create certainty in an uncertain world?

**Sarah Worley-James**

worley-james@cardiff.ac.uk



**One lesson the pandemic has taught us is that we can successfully meet the challenges of change in an uncertain world.**

Uncertainty remains a dominant theme in the anxieties and concerns that clients bring to therapy. As therapists, we have had a closer affinity with our clients' feelings and experiences and together, we have instinctively sought certainty, security and safety.

### Creating choices

Meeting their counsellor online has helped some clients to feel a greater degree of certainty in the development of their therapeutic relationships. Having more choice over where and how they meet (within the confines of the media offered), creates an environment where clients can feel safer to disclose and explore their painful experiences or vulnerable sides. The client shielding or fearful of physical contact has been able to access counselling safely to support them in dealing with these fears. The client struggling with the demands of family life and working from home has been able to carve out the precious time for counselling, without having to find the additional time for travel. When we were all in lockdown for so many weeks at a time, clients were still able to engage in counselling and all the support that it offered.

Conversely, counsellors may have found that working online felt intrusive, if they were used to working from an office, with clients suddenly coming into their personal space. Counsellors found once-familiar processes and procedures rapidly changing to meet the new situation and ways of meeting

clients. Now, many of us are dealing with new uncertainties as we have returned to our physical workplaces, often blending our time between there and home working.

While there is much talk of 'the new normal', we know that the pandemic is not over. So, how do we find or create certainty in such an uncertain world? Of course, it's natural for humans to focus on what we don't know and what we are fearful of – which creates further uncertainty and perpetuates a cycle of anxiety and sense of helplessness.

### Creativity in our rooms

Online counselling can support us in our search for certainty, giving us a degree of power and security over both our work and our personal lives. As the client has the choice over where they meet their counsellor, so the counsellor has come to have more choice over their environment. As therapists, we have been able to be creative with our counselling space at home, experimenting with the layout and décor to design somewhere more personal and comfortable than a generic counselling room, often shared with others. This personalisation has the additional effect of supporting us to access our self-care, giving us more control and certainty in this aspect of our daily lives.

In the last 18 months, my home counselling space has evolved to incorporate a waterfall feature, a diffuser and a range of room sprays and essential oil roller balls. With the diffuser in the background (lavender is my choice of oil) and the waterfall switched on, I do a short, five-minute meditation in between clients, and I feel that I have more control over my space, enabling me to successfully manage my stress. I feel more grounded and present for my next client and I notice the difference.

For those counsellors still relatively new to working online, the lack of, or limits to, seeing our clients created an initial uncertainty in how to fully 'meet' and engage with them. In addition, there was the need to gain more technical prowess and confidence in dealing with the effect of the inevitable technical glitches that arise. For some, these challenges led to a corresponding impact on their confidence, affecting their sense of certainty in their skills and ability to create meaningful therapeutic relationships.

### Building confidence

However, as training was undertaken, and experience and skills in meeting clients at relational depth online developed, an accompanying certainty has grown. I'm sure that some readers will have found a natural affinity with one medium and perhaps surprised themselves in the process. A growing confidence connecting with clients online and responding to the inevitable technical difficulties will all increase our sense of certainty in our online counselling abilities.

A benefit of having to rapidly respond to change and an uncertain world, has been the recognition by many of us that we can successfully meet these challenges and focus on finding the certainties that create our sense of security and safety. We have learnt how it feels to have uncertainty all around us, developing a renewed and greater empathy for our clients' experiences of, and responses to, uncertainty. In the process of supporting them to identify the small certainties in their lives, to focus on what choices they *do* have, we have been able to engage in the same process. ●

**Sarah Worley-James** is a Senior Counsellor and Co-ordinator of the Online Service at Cardiff University.

---

From English teacher to coach, **Naomi Ward** talks to **Nicola Banning** about coaching educators across the world. She explains the role of poetry and metaphor in her work and why she believes that education needs positive disruptors to create change

---

*Naomi Ward works as a coach and facilitator for Making Stuff Better, a company seeking to create regenerative spaces for school leaders. She was a secondary school English and Media teacher then Middle Leader for 14 years, before retraining in order to support others.  
naomi@makingstuffbetter.com*

**NB: Teaching really is a vocation. What drew you to the profession initially?**

**NW:** When I left university, I had no idea what to do and stumbled into a marketing career. I felt quite lost, so I took a pause to learn Spanish in Granada and felt completely at home in a classroom in the presence of the connection and moments of magic that can happen in this uniquely relational space. I decided to be a teacher.

This magic happens when a student makes a leap into new territory. As a young teacher, I remember moments with children, as they talked through their ideas about a novel and would suddenly come to the realisation that the central meaning of a metaphor had unlocked their understanding. Their eyes would widen and the concepts and characters would fall into place as they came to realise the craft of the writer. These moments are fleeting but extremely precious.

Also, kids are brilliant. Funny, kind, thirsty to learn, cheeky, challenging, exasperating and great company. It turned out to be an environment that brought out the best in me as I tried to bring out the best in them.

**NB: Was there a point when you fell out of love with teaching?**

**NW:** Over time, I felt that the conditions I needed to be my best were eroded, both by my environment and my response to it.

A saying that comes to mind is, 'Teachers don't make good soldiers'. That is, we bring our own passions, values and disruptive superpowers to bear in service of challenging the status quo. When those intrinsic qualities are dimmed and unseen,

it's a source of loss. As I began to lose touch with who I was, the job became monochrome and an uphill struggle.

A tipping point was my reactivity to the situation. I was frustrated that I wasn't being seen or heard and that colleagues were suffering. I remember teachers early in their career finding the days impossible because of the scrutiny they were under. Inevitably, this would lead to self-doubt and anxiety which, of course, makes it even harder to take risks and learn.

I'd had enough. What I didn't know at this point was the extent of the loss that came with giving up something that I perceived as so central to my identity. Who was I? I was a teacher. So, who was I now?

**NB: I've worked with the teaching profession for nearly 20 years as a therapist in the public sector, and am aware of the recurring themes impacting on morale and wellbeing. How do you see it?**

**NW:** I listen to and see the person at the centre of a system. What I notice is the impact of a system that is out of balance: what the individual is contributing and how this is reciprocated is skewed. This imbalance is essential to the current system's success, and restoring balance would mean rethinking what we teach, how we teach and how we assess.

From the beginning of our training, there are some unwritten rules of belonging: 'You have to put in the hours, that's just how it is, don't expect a social life, that's how it was for me too'. So, we comply. Our





# My *workplace*

value is squarely placed on productivity and doing, not our inherent value and our being.

I have also observed that, in some schools, the power dynamic of the teacher/student is transferred onto the wider organisational culture. Teachers seek validation from authority figures: praise for good work, a need to be seen and heard, and if we are not, there are feelings of resentment, envy and why bother? Over the years, educators have also been vilified in the press, most recently for laziness when they worked from home during the pandemic. This matters and it's hurtful.

Persistent habits of overwork, combined with a perception of not being valued or heard, leads to burnout and frustration. It feels impossible to find time in the margins of the day to remember who we are and what we want; but inevitably, there comes a time when this part of us, our soul, intervenes and demands to be heard.

**NB: This sounds like the wound that I've seen so often when working with those clients in vocations, like teaching, where systemically it can be so harmful. I wonder how you see or feel it?**

**NW:** My imagination goes to seeing myself when I was younger, talking to a student maybe at break or after a lesson. I'm listening, offering encouragement, taking my time, giving space and through my calm presence, easing her worries.

I see now that my presence was enough and that it made a difference. Not only in students' learning but also in their ability to gain a healthier perspective when things felt overwhelming. Teenagers have so much to cope with: the maelstrom of growing up, many more exams and tests than we can contemplate, shifting family dynamics, navigating friendship groups in reality and online, and today's mental health challenges.

The hurt, then, is that I didn't know then what I know now. That my ability to be an attentive, compassionate presence was always more important than my productivity. In the words of Carl Jung: 'Learn your theories as well as you can, but put them aside when you touch the miracle of the living soul'.

**NB: How did you move from teaching to coaching?**

**NW:** Through my teaching network, I met an innovative, disruptive educator who I admired. I told her about my decision to leave the profession and emphatically she told me, 'You must speak to Hannah. She's a coach and she changed my life.' That was was good enough for me, so I picked up the phone.

**'In the words of Carl Jung: "Learn your theories as well as you can, but put them aside when you touch the miracle of the living soul"'**



In those first few conversations with Hannah, I sank into the emotions I'd experienced through leaving a job I had loved, and in parallel, I began to see that I was more than a label. In the presence of her questions and the experience of being truly seen as myself, the roof lifted up from the room; I had more freedom and oxygen to think and create than I could remember.

One of the principles of coaching which felt so liberating is the belief that everyone is naturally creative, resourceful and whole. I'm very fierce about this belief; if we commit to seeing each other in this way, over time, we start to believe it for ourselves. And with this acceptance, we allow our natural gifts, longing and bold vision to come through us, and the status quo simply has to make way.

Compare this generative belief with the one I assumed before: that I was valued for the numbers on the spreadsheet and the grades on the exam paper. When I was asked, 'What's important to you, what's your unique gift, what do you care about, what makes you come alive, what's your vision, what's the impact that only you can have?', I remembered my soul and felt it sigh with relief. I was finally paying attention.

From here, it made sense to train as a coach and take those questions back into schools.

**NB: Can you tell me about a typical day in your professional life?**

**NW:** I'm often up early because I work with educators all over the world, so the end of their school day might be 6am for me. Before I get onto zoom, I begin with a short ritual that creates some space and stillness, linking back to the renewed emphasis on being, rather than doing. I go into the garden, where we have a beautiful tree, and I stand and listen, remembering that deep presence and observation is the main thing. I remember that I'm not there to know the answers.

After my early morning coaching, I get the kids to school, go for a short

walk and listen to something, maybe a podcast for brain food, or just music if I want thoughts to settle. I'll catch up with colleagues before more coaching, or facilitation of groups and courses. I might research and write blogs, responding to themes which are coming up in conversations with our clients.

Because I have so much time at a computer, I have to be disciplined to step away and have coffee with a friend or do some exercise. I'm still working this out!

**NB: How do you describe your work?**

**NW:** I'd describe my work as fulfilling, challenging and disruptive. I create conditions for teachers to move away from the tramlines that they feel they should follow, in order to forge their own path and create something that they know is needed in the world. Of course, the nature of what the world needs now will disrupt the status quo, and often the purpose that surfaces is along themes of sustainability, social justice, alternative education provision, values-led leadership, compassionate school cultures and equality.

I'll give you an example. I worked with Christina, a teacher in a primary school, who felt constricted in her role. In our first conversation, it was clear that she had a passion for the natural world. She would spend her free time seeking rare orchids; the sheer wonder in her when she discovered one was contagious! This was her element and a connection to a precious time in her childhood.

Because Christina hadn't been the top student academically at school, she recognised the gifts in children she taught who were not, on paper, 'successful'. This touched something in her, and she realised that nature was a classroom where all would feel a sense of belonging, equity and freedom.

Over the time we worked together, her sense of purpose became more powerful than her fears of not being heard: she put together a presentation and explained to her school leaders why her vision was important for the school community.

They listened. They felt her speaking from her heart and this is when we have our most influence. Her colleagues gave her the green light to develop her vision to create an outdoor classroom.

**NB: Who do you work with and what is the purpose of your work?**

**NW:** I feel lucky that now I have found collaborators who share the belief that we can positively disrupt education for the better. I work with a company called, Making Stuff Better, and we believe that we

'I think it's too soon to get my arms around what has been changed in me and others since the pandemic. Maybe we will leave this to the artists, novelists and playwrights to make sense of over time'



can transform education through the inner work of its leaders. We create regenerative spaces where educators can think differently, remember who they are and take skilful action from their values and purpose.

When we step back and think about the future, we see a globe dotted with educators who we have supported. They are talking to each other: sharing their innovative and deeply human ways of working with young people, families and communities.

**NB: How important is your background as an English teacher with a love of language to your current work?**

**NW:** Being an English teacher, I have a good grounding in asking questions that take thinking to a deeper level. In terms of language, having an ear for metaphor is useful. In the book, *Metaphors We Live By*, the authors George Lakoff and Mark Johnson say that '...we use about one metaphor for every ten to twenty-five words, or about six metaphors a minute'.

Each of these images, that we use unconsciously, is a doorway to our inner world. By noticing these doorways and inviting people into a landscape that is both unfamiliar yet familiar, they are able to explore forgotten parts of themselves. I have also found that people remember and return to these visual and sensory experiences as inner resources.

Because of our deep sense of familiarity with metaphor, poetry speaks to us. When we can't find the words to express something that we are longing for, we find that the poets have already said it. I have a journal of poems close to hand when I'm coaching, and sometimes I'll ask permission to read one, as bringing another voice into our conversation transcends the fear that we are alone. Someone has had this thought before, this challenge before, this insight before, and feeling this timeless connection is reassuring, moving and a call to courage.





For example, in her poem, *Wild Geese*, Mary Oliver reminds us that our pathway to a meaningful life and belonging is simply to allow ourselves to love what we love. Reading it again now reminds me of Christina, and how nature was calling her back to herself, and finally, she allowed herself to listen:

*You do not have to be good.  
You do not have to walk on your knees  
for a hundred miles through the desert repenting.  
You only have to let the soft animal of your body  
love what it loves.  
Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.  
Meanwhile the world goes on.  
Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain  
are moving across the landscapes,  
over the prairies and the deep trees,  
the mountains and the rivers.  
Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air,  
are heading home again.  
Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,  
the world offers itself to your imagination,  
calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting –  
over and over announcing your place  
in the family of things.*



**NB: I know you work with educators internationally, which must give you both a unique and broad perspective. Can you reflect on the common themes or differences among heads and teachers?**

**NW:** The differences I have noticed are the challenges that leaders face. Most pressing at the moment for international school leaders is how to care for a team of people who have not been able to go home for almost two years. Teachers have missed life events with their families because of restrictions on travel. Some have taken action and simply left, which leaves the school leaders without a teacher at very short notice.

Another difference is the freedom that international schools have with the curriculum. While in the UK what we teach in most subjects is prescribed, certainly at GCSE and A Level, there is greater freedom within international schools, many of whom will teach the International Baccalaureate. Indeed, this freedom is a reason why UK teachers make the leap to a life abroad.

What we have in common is a sense of hope and a love of learning. My longing is that teachers all over the world take time to pause in order to stay in contact with their unique gifts. I want every teacher to have a coach.

**NB: Do you have a favourite quote or book about leadership that you'd like to recommend?**

**NW:** A book that I would recommend is *The Heart Aroused: poetry and the preservation of the soul in corporate America*, by David Whyte. From the subtitle, you can glean why this book might be useful for educators who find themselves in increasingly corporate settings.



Whyte says that poetry is '...language against which we have no defence'. Here are the closing lines from his poem, *Sweet Darkness*, to illustrate that:

*You must learn one thing.  
The world was made to be free in.  
Give up all the other worlds  
except the one to which you belong.  
Sometimes it takes darkness and the sweet  
confinement of your aloneness  
to learn  
anything or anyone  
that does not bring you alive  
is too small for you.*

**NB: What have you learnt about yourself and the people you work with since the pandemic?**

**NW:** I think it's too soon to get my arms around what has been changed in me and others since the pandemic. Maybe we will leave this to the artists, novelists and playwrights to make sense of over time. I found working and having three kids at home incredibly challenging, and we all did what we could to get through it!

I think there are three main points to remember:

1. Self-compassion is an essential life skill and practice.
2. We need face-to-face connection and our communities in order to be well.
3. We owe everything to our frontline services, and how we treat them is a reflection of the integrity of our Government.

**NB: The pandemic has impacted on the workforce in a variety of ways. As we emerge, what does the education profession in the UK need most now?**

**NW:** This is a huge question, worthy of a book in itself. My observations are distilled into five needs:

- To cultivate safe, compassionate working cultures, where everyone is valued, included and given space to be themselves.

- To find a renewed sense of what education is about: joy, wonder, making connections, community, challenge, courage, identity, self-worth, creativity, meaning and so much more.
- Flexible working for teacher-parents, carers and anyone who wants to balance their work with their health or what brings them joy.
- Recognition that many families are living in poverty and that this is a terrible barrier to learning and life chances. Acknowledgement that giving every child a stable footing is a responsibility for all, and schools are not able to close the gap without greater investment and sensible, caring, sustained policy.
- For our schools to be trusted to know what's best for their children and communities.

**NB: What is your proudest achievement?**

**NW:** To witness what has changed for the educators who I have worked with. They are being courageous, making waves and contributing to what education and the world needs most. This will continue to unfold.

**NB: Do you have any plans for the future?**

**NW:** I'm in the process of writing a book, which will be a collection of our stories as well as a map of the process we have used in order to uncover our purpose. And one day, I'd love to live abroad, somewhere warm, where I can write, read, coach and enjoy being in nature every day. ●

**Tell us about your workplace**

If you have thoughts about any of the issues raised in this interview or would like to talk to the editor about your workplace, we would like to hear from you. Please email Nicola Banning: [workplaceeditor@bacp.co.uk](mailto:workplaceeditor@bacp.co.uk)

# Race matters

**Letesia Gibson** is founder of *New Ways*, a consultancy supporting organisations that seek to embed cultural change. It was set up with a vision to support both businesses and charities to step into new and better ways of working that are fit for purpose for a progressive, diverse Britain.  
[www.timefornewways.com](http://www.timefornewways.com)



How damaging is doing nothing when it comes to creating anti-racist workplaces? **Letesia Gibson** argues that a culture of allyship is essential if organisations are to create genuinely inclusive workplaces

**'A**re you with me?', is a question that job seekers often ask themselves when they are searching for a new employer, as well as by those questioning whether their existing workplace is somewhere they want to stay. According to some recent research, 41% of people planning to leave their current workplace in the next six to 12 months, cite poor workplace culture as a key reason for their exit.<sup>1</sup> Increasingly, it seems, people are seeking a work culture that demonstrates integrity, which stands up for doing the right thing and which focuses on diversity and inclusion in meaningful ways. Yet, so often what I witness in business is a disconnect between the intention of creating allyship and the reality of making allyship action a reality.

## The risks of inaction over allyship

I followed the events unfolding at the Yorkshire Cricket Club<sup>2</sup> at the end of last year. The painful failings of the club's internal culture led to a collective denial of the impacts of racism on cricketer, Azeem Rafiq, which were written off as 'banter'.<sup>3</sup> With new leadership and fresh ownership of the problem, meaningful action now appears possible and there is a commitment to addressing the embedded issues. While Yorkshire Cricket Club hit the news headlines dramatically, they are not alone as an organisation to (knowingly or not) allow racism to continue to impact the experience of the workforce of colour because of inaction.

There is a myriad of possible reasons that underpin inaction in an organisation, and few come from a place of intending to cause harm to others. However,

the potential consequences of inaction can lead to poor outcomes and damage reputation. I can't help but wonder, how many missed opportunities were there at Yorkshire Cricket Club for creating stronger allyship that might have led to a different outcome?

Let's imagine how things might have played out differently, if a stronger culture of allyship at the club had existed. Could a formal complaint have been avoided, if this were the case? Would Azeem Rafiq have felt greater solidarity from his team, easing his distress? Perhaps the issue of racism-infused 'banter' might have been raised by those observing it earlier, providing support to Rafiq. If learning and development opportunities had been offered to players, this could have helped to raise the level of cultural intelligence needed in a diverse team, and a conversation as a result of this may have offered a moment to reflect on behaviour towards people who are marginalised in the workplace.

In truth, we'll never know if these kinds of interventions could have led to a different outcome. However, simply raising the questions can help us to understand how costly inaction can be to an organisation, and get to the heart of why building a culture of allyship is so vital for organisations, if we are to shift from inaction to action in addressing embedded racism.

## Are there risks to being an ally?

Instead, what I often hear is that individuals are worried about how becoming an ally may be a risk for

them in their workplace, and comments like these are not uncommon:

*'I don't want to offend someone. Who am I to speak up on their behalf? I'd need to know all of the details and feel certain before I stepped in and said something.'*


*'I'm sure they didn't mean it intentionally. I know they're not a bad person.'*

When an organisation is learning how to become an inclusive and discrimination-free workplace, there's often an assumption that there is 'a right way' and 'a wrong way' to deal with issues. This thinking impedes our ability to be with the complex, messy, grey area that sits in between, and it is not a space that organisations like to be in. Yet, it's essential that we learn how to inhabit this space because, when there is a need for absolute certainty, allyship struggles to flourish, because our organisations don't yet have a shared understanding of what is and what *isn't* racist.

## Who has power and influence?

One definition of allyship describes it as, 'The in-group taking actions of solidarity in service to the out-group'. Interestingly, a challenge to this definition, is that people often don't consider themselves as being part of the in-group, as was recently highlighted in a study on workplace inclusion by McKinsey.<sup>4</sup> Feeling like 'an outsider' is an experience that many of us can relate to in the workplace, whether due to gender, class, education, accent, or a lack of





**'I can't help but wonder, how many missed opportunities were there at Yorkshire Cricket Club for creating stronger allyship that might have led to a different outcome?'**

seniority. Whatever the reason, it can undermine an employee's perceived ability to use their influence to create change for others.

### What does an ally look like?

I've heard people mention grand gestures where allies have whistle blown, or courageously called out bad behaviour in the workplace, where they are seen as someone who is brave, confident and influential, meaning allies can be mythologised as 'someone who is not like me'. There is often a disconnect between what we think allyship should look like and the simple allyship actions that can make a difference.

Therefore, it's important not to overlook these actions, including: listening to the needs of marginalised groups; investing in understanding the workplace situations that create challenges for these groups of people; creating opportunities for learning around inappropriate behaviour which is rooted in racism; and talking and listening to the person on the receiving end of observed racism, after the event.

Allyship should feel authentic to who we are and the influence we can use in the workplace, and we will all have a platform to create change that looks and feels different from the next person.

### The power of allyship

It's not always easy to find out what is and isn't OK in organisations. Instead, we usually learn through osmosis from the culture and behaviours that we observe. Information about our stance on discrimination too often only lives in formal policies that most employees are not familiar with, and which don't always adequately deal with the full array of everyday or structural racism incidences that can occur.

So, there's real value in looking at allyship through an organisational lens, being clear about how it is being defined and with a commitment to supporting people to become an ally in a way that gives them confidence that they are aligned with the organisation's position. A positive initiative from

an HR or inclusivity and diversity team, to inspire confident action and establish the concept of allyship as a successful concept, could include the following:

### Make allyship visible

Allyship doesn't live in book clubs and self-learning, although they both may form the foundation of it. Allyship is about taking actions that are visible to others in the organisation. It helps in taking visible action if allies don't feel the pressure to act in the moment, at least in the early days of practising allyship. That's because in-the-moment action can take a lot of skill, to manage both the emotions (of everyone in the room) *and* communicate effectively. Taking the space to step away from strong emotions and reactions, to create a strategy for action, can become a useful opportunity to learn, rather than an accusation that may be met with defensiveness.

### Motivations for allyship

I often invite clients to reflect on three questions to help them to build their understanding of their allyship action:

- Who am I doing this for?
- What difference could it make?
- What will happen if I do nothing?

When we have a clear picture of who the action is in service of, its potential for change and the likely cost of inaction, it can provide a very different motivation for stepping up.

### Allies need other allies

Being an ally can feel like a lonely place to be, if we are acting as just one

person taking individual action. Sharing learnings between allies to strengthen skills, grow collective confidence to be open and vulnerable, and to increase understanding of what works and what doesn't, is hugely valuable. Given how much growth many companies need in order to become truly inclusive and discrimination-free spaces, this kind of investment is vital.

### Allies in 2022

Allyship is the cornerstone of a workplace that is committed to learning to be anti-racist. It can help support an organisational culture that is able to look at itself and question habits which reinforce an undesirable status quo. It's an important mechanism to build trust and relationships across a diverse workforce that is rooted in shared beliefs and values – and it's essential if companies want to attract a wider range of people to their businesses. Beyond that, it shows we really care about the experience and opportunities of all our people. My hope is that 2022 is the year where we will see more companies prioritising allyship to create stronger foundations for their work in equality, diversity and inclusivity. ●

### REFERENCES

- 1 [https://hr.personio.de/hubfs/EN\\_Downloads/202104\\_HRStudy\\_UK1.pdf](https://hr.personio.de/hubfs/EN_Downloads/202104_HRStudy_UK1.pdf)
- 2 <https://www.bbc.com/sport/cricket/59166142>
- 3 <https://www.theguardian.com/news/audio/2021/nov/16/azeem-rafiqs-long-battle-to-expose-racism-at-yorkshire-cricket-club>
- 4 <https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/people-and-organizational-performance/our-insights/understanding-organizational-barriers-to-a-more-inclusive-workplace>

# When 'old Mark' meets 'new Mark'

How can we best support workplace clients who are experiencing long COVID?  
**Anupama Garg** offers a case study



**Dr Anupama Garg** is an MBACP accredited and EMDR Europe accredited integrative counsellor, psychotherapist and an academic. Her main therapeutic interests are attachment-informed EMDR trauma work, PTSD, anxiety, work-related stress and other life issues, including loss.  
agarg.psychotherapy@gmail.com

**L**ong COVID is a relatively new condition demanding that health professionals from doctors to psychotherapists work out the best approach for helping those suffering with the condition.<sup>1</sup> According to the Office for National Statistics, up to one million Britons are found to be experiencing long COVID, of which a large percentage are between the ages of 35 and 69<sup>2</sup> and of working age. Despite this, I couldn't find a single case study written by a workplace counsellor reflecting on their work with an employee experiencing long COVID. Therefore, this case study focuses on my work with a client called Mark, who I met through the Staff Counselling Service at the University of Lancashire (UCLAN), where I work as an integrative counsellor.

## What is long COVID?

Long COVID is described as a range of up to 200 symptoms that COVID-19 patients continue to suffer from, even after 12 weeks of no longer being infected by the corona virus – SARS COV-2.<sup>3,4</sup> The physical symptoms include

persistent fatigue, heart palpitations and tight chest, difficulty with breathing, temperature, headaches, cough, constant pain, reduction in taste and smell and so on, for which patients are managed by their physicians.<sup>3</sup> The mental health effects of long COVID, such as anxiety and depression, are common, and are precipitated by the sufferers' continued physical ill health, combined with mental fog, which are contingent upon social factors, including their jobs, financial status, family responsibilities and age.<sup>4</sup>

## Introducing Mark – a case study

Mark is an academic, who prided himself on managing a significant workload of higher education teaching and learning delivery through a large team of academics, and who liaised with many professional services staff across the university. He loved the fast-paced life involving frequent travel for business, chairing meetings, ad hoc teaching and special projects. In his personal life, Mark enjoyed maintaining a large garden, outdoor pursuits, motorcycling and attending music gigs and festivals.



It was early in the winter of 2020 when Mark caught COVID-19. A couple of months after he was diagnosed with long COVID, he referred himself to the Staff Counselling Service at UCLAN. Our sessions were all delivered online and began in April 2021, and this article covers our work between then and August 2021. In addition to our work on his psychological health, Mark was also being supported by the occupational health service at the university, his GP, and at home by his wife, who had effectively become Mark's carer.

### Managing expectations of self

During our first session, Mark described himself as a 'shadow of his former self', who was in constant pain, becoming tired after talking for 10 to 15 minutes, and who found even mundane tasks a challenge, such as showering or hanging out the washing. Despite this, Mark longed to go back to his old self quickly, believing that if he physically challenged himself, he would not only get physically stronger faster, but also he could conquer his fatigue and perhaps get some of his mental strength back. Mark set himself physical

challenges, such as mowing his large lawns in one afternoon and then going for a five-kilometre bike ride the next day. He explained how he was physically wiped out for 24 hours or more after such physical activities and was shocked to find his energies so depleted.

I explained the 'spoon theory'<sup>5</sup> to Mark and suggested that pacing, planning and prioritising principles (three Ps)<sup>6</sup> for conserving energy and managing fatigue could be helpful. The spoon theory requires individuals to estimate the amount of energy they wake up with each morning in spoon units and explains how some tasks consume more

**'I couldn't find a single case study written by a workplace counsellor reflecting on their work with an employee experiencing long COVID'**



energy than others. The spoon theory and three Ps together stress the importance of organising one's day according to the total energy one wakes up with on a particular day, pacing activities with scheduled rest periods, and how one should always remain in a small amount of energy surplus to maintain functionality and aid recovery.

### Therapy session practicalities

I was very conscious of Mark's fatigue levels, and contracted to work together for approximately 15 minutes per session, on a fortnightly basis. I followed this up with an email after each session to remind Mark of the work we had done. This was necessary as sometimes even our 15-minute sessions were enough to leave him exhausted for the rest of the day. I also looked out for the signs of fatigue in his speech, such as a lowered voice tone and/or slowed speech. If Mark looked particularly tired during these short sessions, we would move on to some mindfulness practice or another relaxation exercise to close the session. Mark also always had the option of requesting an earlier than planned closure to the session, if he felt too tired. However, he didn't have to use the early closure option at all during therapy, as he found 15 minutes to be just the right length for sessions during the early stage of therapy.

After a month of receiving therapy, offered in short, fortnightly sessions, with a focus on Mark's energy levels, he was then able to increase the length of the sessions up to 40 minutes. This allowed us to begin addressing his fears about his ability to return to work in the future, and to reflect on how he saw and felt about

‘Mark described himself as a “shadow of his former self”, who was in constant pain, becoming tired after talking for 10 to 15 minutes and found even mundane tasks a challenge, such as showering or hanging out the washing’

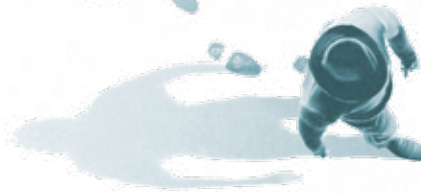


himself as he learnt to live with the impact of long COVID. This meant asking what a return to work meant for Mark. And, if he went back to his existing job, what tasks he might be able to carry out and what assistance or adaptations he might require from his employer.

By now, Mark had been away from work on sickness absence for eight months, and it was clear to both of us that he was neither physically nor mentally ready to return to work yet. This led us to a more complex exploration of Mark's identity. We looked at how he saw 'new Mark', a man with long COVID and who got tired; whose wife undertook most of the tasks requiring interactions with outsiders and/or leaving home, such as shopping or liaising with workmen; and a man who was thinking about going back to work.

### ‘Old Mark’ meets ‘new Mark’

When I asked Mark what he thought of 'new Mark', he flinched and snapped: 'The "old Mark" wouldn't have given even two minutes to this "new Mark"!'. Mark's distaste for 'new Mark' was visible on his face and seemed almost visceral, which shocked both of us. But then, after a short silence, Mark described 'new Mark' as a kinder person, who listens; knows his limitations; who has learnt to delegate because he can't manage everything himself; forgets things from time to time; enjoys nature; and who now knows what panic is about, having experienced a panic attack in an optician's shop when he was unable to understand what was being explained to him. Mark's description of himself symbolised his cognitive effort to understand and perhaps start to like 'new Mark'. I therefore asked him whether it was possible for him to make friends with 'new Mark'.



In the session that followed, Mark returned with a list of the shortcomings of 'old Mark'. For example, 'old Mark' only cared for his work and spent too much time doing it; he sat hunched up for days at a time writing emails, video conferencing; didn't have time for his wife and focused only on his career. As this is a popular societal critique and stereotype of career-focused individuals,<sup>7</sup> I wondered whether this was a genuine personal critique of the 'old Mark'. This polarity of 'old Mark' as bad and the new 'new Mark' as good, jarred with me. This is because I believed that a successful adjustment to and acceptance of the 'new Mark' need not be based on discrediting the 'old Mark'.

I asked Mark whether it was possible for him to accept both Marks? In other words, could Mark celebrate the achievements of 'old Mark', while exploring the possibilities of 'new Mark'? This involved dealing with the loss of 'old Mark's' physical and mental health, while celebrating all that he had achieved, before the exploration of 'new Mark's' qualities, attitudes and aspirations and the work role that 'new Mark' would now like to do.

### Acceptance of the two 'Marks'

Inevitably, this involved deeper work on the many losses he faced, including missing 'old Mark's' vigour and mastery at work, along with his confidence. Mark had enjoyed leading a large team of academics and was proud of his teaching and learning awards, his ability to multitask and make decisions quickly. His sense of sadness about his dependence on his wife, and his anger at getting long COVID were also a normal part of the loss process.<sup>8</sup> The intensity and frequency of the associated pain that Mark feels about this is likely to depend on how little or much gain in

**'I was very conscious of Mark's fatigue levels and contracted to work together for approximately 15 minutes per session on a fortnightly basis. I followed this up with an email after each session to remind Mark of the work we had done'**

functionality he experiences in the future. However, as long COVID is such a new disease, it's hard for doctors to guide patients as to what to expect.<sup>1</sup>

Mark came to like 'new Mark's' quality of being empathic, his joy of nature, understanding of his physical and mental limits, his new-found love of drawing and calligraphy, and his ease of companionship with his wife. He also conveyed that his wife seemed to like 'new Mark' more than 'old Mark', despite the fact that she was doing more than her fair share of household work, as well as looking after and caring for him.

Next, we decided to work on how 'new Mark' envisaged his ideal day, in the event that he might not get better or be able to return to work in his current job role. Drawing on my training in solution-focused therapy, I asked Mark to imagine how he would like his ideal day to begin, what time and where he would have his breakfast, what type of work he would like to do and where, when he would take breaks in his work and how long for, what time his work would begin and end, and how he would spend his evenings after work and before bed.<sup>9</sup> Mark was clear that he wanted to wake up around 8am and take a walk after breakfast, before starting work in his garage at 10am, repairing old motorbikes. He planned a break at 11am for coffee, lunch at 12.30 and to finish work by 4pm. He planned to spend his evenings in the company of his wife, and to be in bed by 10pm. As 'new Mark's' personal and professional aspirations were very different from 'old Mark's', we discussed how Mark might seek financial advice and consult with HR, to consider the full range of options offered by his employer, such as redeployment or early retirement.

## Closing thoughts

As a workplace counsellor, my role was to see Mark to this point in his journey, which included supporting him to manage his pain and fatigue levels, working through the loss of 'old Mark' and leading to acceptance of both new and old Marks. Throughout this work, there were very real concerns for Mark, including how long he could remain signed-off work and be entitled to sick pay; how his employer would support him to transition back to work if he became well enough to return to his old job; and what alternative work he might be offered by his employer if he didn't get fully better. Undoubtedly, these uncertainties and the worry of losing his job added to Mark's fears about his health, family and future financial safety while living with long COVID.

It's impossible to imagine that most people of working age unfortunate enough to experience long COVID, who were successful, independent individuals pre COVID, would not face fears and concerns similar to those of Mark. As our profession bears witness to more people like Mark, living with the realities of long COVID, I hope this case study sheds light on one practitioner's experience. It's my hope that employers will think about the long-term futures of their employees and that the UK Government will provide financial support in the form of disability benefits for those whose working lives are cut short due to long COVID. ●

*\*Mark is a pseudonym chosen by the client to protect his confidentiality.*

**‘It’s impossible to imagine that most people of working age unfortunate enough to experience long COVID, who were successful, independent individuals pre COVID, would not face fears and concerns similar to those of Mark’**

## REFERENCES

- 1 Newman M. Chronic fatigue syndrome and long Covid: moving beyond the controversy. *BMJ* 2021; 373: n1559. [Online.] <http://dx.doi.org/10.1136/bmj.n1559>
- 2 Office for National Statistics. Prevalence of ongoing symptoms following coronavirus (Covid 19) infection in the UK: 5 August 2021. [Online.] <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/conditionsanddiseases/bulletins/prevalenceofongoingsymptomsfollowingcoronaviruscovid19infectionintheuk/5august2021> (accessed 15 August 2021).
- 3 National Health Service. Long term effects of coronavirus (long COVID). [Online.] <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/long-term-effects-of-coronavirus-long-covid/> (accessed 19 July 2021).
- 4 Gregory A. The race to cure long covid, the world's next health crisis. *The Sunday Times*. [Online.] <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/more-than-one-million-britons-have-long-covid-h7gqqbfh3> (accessed 15 August 2021).
- 5 Soph. The spoon theory explained. Mummying and ME. [Weblog.] <https://mummyingandme.com/2019/07/22/how-to-manage-the-low-energy-levels-of-m-e-cfs-the-spoon-theory/> (accessed 12 March 2021).
- 6 Royal College of Occupational Therapists. How to conserve your energy. [Online.] <https://www.rcot.co.uk/conserving-energy> (accessed 4 May 2021).
- 7 Griffiths M. Workaholism – a 21st century addiction. *The Psychologist* 2011; 24(10): 740–744. [Online.] <https://thepsychologist.bps.org.uk/volume-24/edition-10/workaholism-%E2%80%93-21st-century-addiction> (accessed 24 August 2021).
- 8 Kubler-Ross E, Kessler G. On grief and grieving: finding the meaning of grief through the five stages of loss. London: Simon & Schuster; 2005.
- 9 O'Connell B. Solution focused therapy – brief therapy series. Third edition. London: Sage; 2012.





## Workplace matters

# Why do we panic buy?

**Sandi Mann**

smann@uclan.ac.uk



First it was soap. Then it was loo rolls. Before long it was petrol. When did our nation of shopkeepers morph into a nation of panic buyers – and how can we help our panicking clients?

Prior to March 2020, few of us had ever really experienced the mass stockpiling that we witnessed when lockdown was looming. As the entire world was shifting on its axis, it probably made sense to ensure that we had enough essentials to bunker down and hibernate – after all, isn't this what we did for centuries when our ancestors hoarded summer fruits, smoked fish and salted meats to get us through the cold winters? Is panic buying toilet rolls really any different?

### Supply and demand

The need to ensure we have enough essential supplies to get us through times of shortage is a basic human instinct that predates COVID-19. The 'scarcity principle'<sup>1</sup> is used in sales and marketing as much as possible. This is why adverts exhort customers to 'buy now', with claims that 'when it's gone, it's gone'. If you try to book a holiday online, the website will tell you how many properties it has left ('only two remaining! Hurry!') and how many other people are looking ('20 people looking – better be quick!') – all clever marketing tools designed to hurry us into grabbing it before it's too late.

What is different today, perhaps, is that many of the essential items we crave are not actually scarce – we just fear that they are. However, the human response to fear is of course exactly

the same, whether that fear is rational or not, as those of us who treat anxiety conditions will know.

### Survival instinct

We are hardwired to respond to threats to our safety and security by taking steps to increase our survival. Put like that, it is easy to see why we might hoard food or fuel, but it is harder to see how access to loo rolls is a survival instinct; this is where other psychological forces come into play. There is another concept that psychologists talk about, called social proof.<sup>1</sup> This is especially relevant in times of uncertainty; when we don't know what to do or how to behave, we look at what others are doing and copy them. I witnessed this recently when a hotel fire alarm went off at 11pm. As I opened my door, I was totally unsurprised to see the whole corridor full of people's heads, as they peered out – checking to see what everyone else was doing about the uncertain situation unfolding. Once I said the magic words, 'We should evacuate' (I am not a university fire marshal for nothing), the entire corridor sprang into action and everyone followed me. It just needed one person – anyone – to take action in an uncertain situation and everyone followed.

That's what's happened at the petrol pumps and supermarkets. The people taking action are sending cues to the less certain about how to act. And, unlike earlier times in history, those cues are flooding us via the media. We are human – we can't help but follow the leader. It is a survival instinct that could save our lives; if we don't know what to do, the best solution is to follow someone who does seem to know what to do. And when there are hordes of others hoarding (see what I did there!), it makes sense to assume they

must be doing this for good reason – and to follow.

These psychological factors appear to be borne out by the research, which suggests that having children, experiencing symptoms of depression, being relatively wealthy or being at risk of losing your job are all correlated with increased panic buying.<sup>2</sup> It makes sense – having dependants to provide for, worrying about income (or having enough of it to fund stockpiling) or having low mood are bound to make you want to increase control, certainty and security in your life.

If panic buying is such an instinct, is there anything we can do to help our panicking clients? There are many tools at our disposal to help engage the rational brain: explaining the above principles, refocusing their attention on rational cues (eg consistent messaging from the Government or from supermarkets), weighing up risks versus costs of hoarding (eg vulnerable people being unable to access supplies), introducing the concepts of cognitive distortions and, perhaps the most important one, helping them to learn to cope with uncertainty.

Whether this will be enough to stem the next toilet roll rush, only time will tell. ●

### REFERENCES

- 1 Cialdini RB. Influence: the psychology of persuasion. New York: Collins; 2007.
- 2 Bentall RP, Lloyd A, Bennett K, McKay R, Mason L, Murphy J et al. Pandemic buying: resting a psychological model of over-purchasing and panic buying using data from the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland during the early phase of the COVID-19 pandemic. [Online.] <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0246339> (accessed 11 November 2021).

**Dr Sandi Mann** is Senior Psychology Lecturer at the University of Central Lancashire. She is a CBT therapist and an accredited EMDR practitioner and has her own private clinic. [www.mindtrainingclinic.com](http://www.mindtrainingclinic.com)

# Q&A

What are the issues that you face in your client work with employee assistance providers (EAPs) and organisations? Q&A is your chance to ask members of BACP Workplace to respond to your workplace queries



*Q I work as a therapist within the NHS and in private practice and have done for some years. Recently, I began working with an agency that contracts with both EAPs, employers and insurers. As I learn more about how therapy is delivered in this sector, I'm becoming confused about clinical responsibility in relation to risk. I understand that the contract extends to, in some cases, three parties: myself, the client and the agency; but ultimately, where does clinical responsibility lie?*

**I**t is normal for this new context to your work to feel different, and the fact you are raising this question speaks to your competence as a counselling professional. In your new working arrangement, the agency is your employing organisation and you are containing the presenting issues of clients who come from a number of different organisations.

Working as a therapist in this context can be extremely rewarding, but it does require investing in CPD to improve one's knowledge and competence in this specialist field of work. The Workplace Counselling Competence Framework<sup>1</sup> was created for this very reason – to support practitioners with their learning and to develop therapeutic confidence and competence in this field of work.

The framework addresses how therapists can navigate nuanced boundaries, specifically in relation to client risk management, and so a good place to start would be to read the section on 'Knowledge of and ability to work within the ethical and legal requirements of a workplace counselling service'.<sup>1</sup> Understanding the broader legislative landscape is essential to help contextualise ethical dilemmas in this type of work.

For example, this could relate to balancing your duty of care to the client with the contractual arrangement the agency employing you has with the client's organisation. If you are unclear, it's essential that you ask the agency for its policy pertaining to client risk management for each of its client organisations, and explore this in supervision. It is important that your supervisor is experienced in workplace counselling and professionally competent to support your therapeutic work in this context.

Let's consider the following fictitious case study that is not uncommon in the workplace context.

## Case study

A single mother of a four-year-old child works in senior management and has been referred to you. She is an experienced operations director within a busy department. During a third session, she discloses that each evening, after she has put her daughter to bed, she drinks at least two large glasses of wine. She jokes, 'At least it's not the whole bottle!'

Initially, this disclosure may not raise concern. However, the amount of alcohol consumed by the employee – two large glasses equate to seven units, half of a woman's weekly unit allowance, according to Government guidelines – and the fact that she is the sole responsible adult at home, raise questions about her ability to care for her daughter while intoxicated. In addition, she's working in a high-pressured role and may not have realised that her dependence on alcohol is a means of stress management.

Of course, the parameters of the counselling contract, specifically the terms of breaching confidentiality, must be closely adhered to, but it would be in the client's interest to address the issue with her in the sessions and for the client to review her employment contract and employer's policies and procedures around the use of alcohol. You might also raise with her the Government's guidelines

around alcohol consumption in order to increase her awareness about her health.

Ethical and legal requirements will also need to be considered in relation to any safeguarding concerns for the safety of her daughter. Usually, exploring this within a session will give you sufficient information to make an ethical decision on whether breaching confidentiality is necessary, but you may need to take this to supervision. You may also wish to refer to section 1:3 in the *Ethical Framework*, which addresses a practitioner's 'Ability to manage confidentiality when working in the organisational context'.

Another question to consider is whether you need to inform the agency or the client's employer? The answer to this depends on the nature of the employee's role and whether there is a safety risk. As the client works in operations, there does not appear to be any direct conflict, subject to contractual and company policies and procedures. You will need to assess whether the client's needs can be met within the remit of the workplace support on offer, or whether external support would be more appropriate, such as a referral to occupational health or signposting to local services/a GP referral.

In a slightly different scenario, if a male employee, who works with machinery and vehicles, disclosed that he drank every day and had 'the odd joint' most evenings, this would require very different actions. The seriousness of this disclosure may mean that a breach of confidentiality is necessary to safeguard the client, other colleagues and in some cases the general public.

Therapists need to know the organisation's policies on alcohol consumption and substance misuse and should contract with clients with these in mind. For example, an employee may think that they are sober the next morning, but both alcohol and marijuana can remain in the system longer than one might realise. This therefore presents a risk to self and to others, and may need to be disclosed immediately to the client's employer if the risk is current.

Working with the client to manage this disclosure is paramount in seeking a positive resolution where the client receives the help they need, without breaking trust and shaming them, especially when dealing with addiction. An employee with a long history at work and who is trusted by their employer, may be able to make an arrangement to undertake modified duties while they seek help to reduce their consumption of alcohol.

Undoubtedly, the issue of client confidentiality is a key consideration for workplace counsellors with regards to the management of risk. Large organisations often have additional third-party resources, such as occupational health, which may form part of the risk management and signposting process. It's best to be well informed and confident in your ability to signpost clients effectively, while legally and ethically managing client confidentiality. On occasions, the client's manager/HR may request an update on the client's progress. Being able to do so is highly dependent on an awareness of best practice, good-enough supervision and awareness of contracted and ethical boundaries.

### Pathways to referral

How an employee accesses their therapy will have implications for both contracting and confidentiality:

**1. Referral by employer:** these may come via HR, a manager, or OH, usually following a discussion between the employer and the employee about the need for an intervention. An employee will usually sign a declaration of consent, and it is important that the therapist reads the consent form and is aware if there are any gaps in understanding of where clinical responsibility lies.

As their therapist, you will still need to contract with the client, and be clear with the client if there are additional reasons why you may need to breach confidentiality.

**2. Self-referral:** When a client self-refers, the issue of risk management will rely more heavily on the policies and procedures of the EAP/agency. We recommend discussing contracting with your supervisor to ensure you have updated your contract to reflect any changes that are necessary, in accordance with EAP/agency guidelines. For example, if an employee self-refers, this is usually to engage with a confidential service that is funded by the employer, but is separate from them.

However, let's imagine that during a third session, the client discloses that she has been experiencing suicidal

thoughts but has no plan to act on them. We would recommend working with the employee to complete a crisis plan. Alongside this, you might explore the employee's suicidal ideation as part of the therapy work and ensure that you reiterate your contractual obligations regarding potential breaches of confidentiality. We recommend you familiarise yourself with the risk management policies for all the stakeholders. If you need to put your own risk management policy in place, you could work this through in supervision, and you will find BACP's GPIA 120 *Working with Risk within the Counselling Professions* is an excellent resource.<sup>3</sup>

It would be good practice to take the suicidal ideation scenario to supervision, to discuss how you would manage it and then check this out with the agency/EAP for its agreement. This will help you to comfortably create an ethical risk management pathway that will allow you to feel confident in developing your strategy, and which will also feed directly into how you contract with your client. ●

### REFERENCES

- 1 <https://www.bacp.co.uk/media/11051/bacp-workplace-competence-framework-mar21.pdf>
- 2 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/delivering-better-oral-health-an-evidence-based-toolkit-for-prevention/chapter-12-alcohol#alcohol-consumption>
- 3 <https://www.bacp.co.uk/events-and-resources/ethics-and-standards/good-practice-in-action/publications/gpia120-working-with-risk-within-the-counselling-professions-fs/>

*Josephine Bey has a background as a clinical director and runs her own consultancy firm supporting businesses and organisations to improve employee engagement through sustainable mental health and inclusion strategies.*  
josephine@joelbconsulting.co.uk

*Denise Ela Maley is a psychotherapist, organisational consultant and former HR director in media, technology and professional services sectors.*  
www.seventhwavetherapy.com

Do you have a query or issue about your work that you'd like some help with? Please email the editor: [workplaceeditor@bacp.co.uk](mailto:workplaceeditor@bacp.co.uk)



## What are you here to do? Nicola Banning talks to author Eloise Skinner about her new book, *The Purpose Handbook*



**Eloise Skinner** is an author, therapist and teacher. She's also the founder of *The Purpose Workshop*, an agency helping clients to navigate their purpose and redesign their lives.  
[www.eloiseskinner.com](http://www.eloiseskinner.com)



**NB:** I can't help but notice that you're younger than the authors I normally speak to for this interview, and I'm honestly in awe of all you've achieved. You graduated from Cambridge with a triple first-class law degree, you've been a corporate lawyer and you're now an author, a therapist and teacher with a wide range of interests. Where did you get your sense of purpose from?

**ES:** To be honest, I never expected to end up here! I started out with a very traditional idea of what success looked like. At law school, and in the years that followed, I saw my 'purpose' as more of a checklist: a set of things to achieve (a good degree, a good job, financial stability, and so on). It wasn't until I'd actually achieved most of those things that I started to wonder what I was doing it all for. The next few years were spent trying to unravel some of these former ideas about purpose, and realign my life around a more honest sense of my own values.

I explored a variety of different paths – I spent some time in a monastic community; I studied logotherapy and existential analysis, and I trained in some of the Eastern meditation/mindfulness practices. It seems like a lot of effort, but it really reflects the restlessness I felt then. I sought to discover the diversity of teachings and traditions out there, to see what I could learn from them. Almost a decade later, I've been able to integrate some of those ideas into my life, in a way that feels personal and meaningful.

**NB:** In *The Purpose Handbook*, you explore what it means to live with purpose and why the concept matters. Can you summarise what your purpose is for you now?

**ES:** My understanding of the 'purpose' concept is that it's always changing, always evolving, in response to the circumstances of life. At the moment, my purpose is focused on helping others find a sense of meaning in their work and lives. I'm doing this through my businesses, and – I hope – through my new book.

**NB:** Who are those people that you're focused on helping now?

**ES:** I've worked with a diverse range of people on topics of purpose and meaning, and it's so exciting to see how purpose-focused work can be applied and explored in different contexts. Now I work with young entrepreneurs, corporate organisations, individual purpose-seekers and students figuring out their next steps after studying, among others. I also work with some social impact organisations – both with their leaders and with the groups of people they serve. For me, this is one of the most rewarding aspects of my work – the ability to offer services and resources to a wide range of people, each on their own journey towards a meaningful life.

**NB:** I know that some of the proceeds of your book go to the charity Career Ready UK. Why is this charity close to your heart?

**ES:** Career Ready UK is a fantastic social mobility charity, supporting

students from a diverse range of backgrounds to develop their skillset, abilities and confidence. I grew up without any connections with business, law or the professional world, and I always felt out of place, like I was constantly falling behind everyone else. Career Ready's mission is to expand the experiences and resources available for *all* young people, so everyone has a fair chance at the future they deserve. I currently sit on the Youth Advisory Board for Career Ready.

**NB:** By the nature of our work, therapists will have done a lot of work on their personal/professional development. But for those who may have lost touch with their purpose or may be helping others to find their own, what would you suggest?

**ES:** One of the interesting things about 'purpose-focused' work is its ongoing nature – it's never really completed. So, it helps to create a consistent practice around this work – try scheduling a weekly time to check in with yourself on an existential level. This check-in time could involve any tools you find helpful, such as journaling, planning, reflecting or more structured purpose-finding practices. The most important element is the commitment you make to continuing this work over time.

In *The Purpose Handbook*, I write about this work being similar to a pilgrimage. In many traditions, a pilgrimage is a journey to be undertaken carefully, with intention,

over a long period of time. And it's not something that comes with a reward or a trophy at the end – it's a challenging, personal journey. 'Purpose-focused' work is similar to this: it's time-consuming, difficult and demanding. But the outcome of finding a sense of personal meaning and purpose is more than enough to justify the effort.

**NB: I'm sure I'm not the only person to be curious about your time spent in a monastery. What did you discover that you've found most helpful about practice and purpose during this time?**

**ES:** Monastic practice is centred around discipline. At the start of the monastic path, you make a clear commitment to a particular lifestyle, and the idea – with traditional monastic communities – is that you follow this for the rest of your life. Even as a member of a non-traditional community, it taught me a huge amount about determination, grit and the power of pursuing a single goal.

My own monastic experience took place within a community established by the Archbishop of Canterbury, and was based in central London. The programme was intended to be integrated with daily life, so I continued to work as a corporate lawyer during the day, and would go to the community gatherings in the evenings and at weekends. This blended experience – having one foot in the spiritual world and one foot in the secular world – gave me a new perspective on work (and on everything else). I began to rebuild the fundamental values and principles of my life, and apply them in new ways, even outside the monastic community itself.

One practice that particularly stood out to me was the creation of a 'Rule of Life'. In this Rule, we (as the members of the community) agreed to a shared set of values and principles to uphold during our year in the programme. The Rule included things like humility, service and dedication, and it shaped our collective behaviour and intention for the year. This practice, of creating a personal 'Rule of Life', is something that I carried with me, even after the programme ended. Taking the time to create a list of personal values – around 10 is a good number for this exercise – can be transformative in

giving your day-to-day life a sense of direction and intention.

**NB: For those who've come through the pandemic and are still in work, there is a lot of talk about this being an era of the great resignation from the workplace. Have you got a view on this and whether people are looking for new purpose?**

**ES:** Absolutely – I think this is an exciting time for people to be thinking about purpose. In the wake of transformative social and cultural change, there's the opportunity to question beliefs, values and habits, and many people are seizing the chance to switch direction.

Over the last few years, we've also been given time away from the communities we usually surround ourselves with. Periods of social isolation tend to encourage us to turn inwards – we start to think more deeply about what we care about, and how we'd like our lives to change when normal life resumes.

**NB: Can everyone live with purpose or is it a rather luxurious concept?**

**ES:** It's a complex question. On the one hand, I believe everyone has the right, entitlement and ability to find a sense of purpose in their lives today, just as they are, and regardless of personal circumstances. On the other hand, personal purpose can often take a back seat when it comes to more immediate life events – dealing with illness, or financial challenges.

It's possible to find purpose, even in the most challenging circumstances, of course. But, for many people, it can feel exhausting to search for a sense of purpose in harder times. So, yes – purpose is for everyone, and it shouldn't be reserved for those with the time or money to pursue it. But the pursuit of purpose should also *benefit* the purpose-finder. If searching for purpose feels like a burden, it's OK to prioritise other elements of life in the meantime.

**NB: Is there anything that you wish business and employers knew about your concept of purpose?**

**ES:** I'd like to see business owners and employers look closely at their own personal mission, values and sense of purpose. If the goal is to create purpose-driven organisations,

change has to start with the people within those organisations. And those at the most senior level should be the first to demonstrate it.

Once business owners and employers are clearer about their own sense of purpose, the next step is to bring that clarity to the company itself. Then, if a company's purpose and values are clear, and – most importantly – if the company upholds those values as it continues its business, the world of work might just become a more meaningful place.

**NB: Who do you most admire in public life?**

**ES:** Lady Hale (the first female President of the UK's Supreme Court) is a great example of a life lived with purpose. Throughout her career – from academia to the judicial system – Lady Hale has maintained a consistent focus on equality, reform and diversity. Her commitment to these goals has been visible in every aspect of her work, and she continues to advocate for change, even after retirement from her judicial position.

**NB: Is there anyone you wish would read your book or who would benefit from doing the work involved?**

**ES:** I hope it can help people who feel lost, or disorientated – like they don't know what the purpose of their life is. I've been in this position myself, and the book is a collection of practices that I found incredibly helpful along the way.

**NB: What three messages do you hope readers will take away from reading your book?**

**ES:** Firstly, that you, as the reader, have the ability to form and shape your life as you like. You're the author of your own journey – the creative control is in your hands.

Secondly, this kind of purpose-finding work is a long-term project. This work builds on itself over time, so don't necessarily expect overnight success or immediate transformation.

And finally, this work should be exciting! This is the task of designing your life, after all. It might just be the most exciting task you get to do. ●

*The Purpose Handbook – A Beginner's Guide to Figuring Out What You're Here To Do*, by Eloise Skinner, is published by Practical Inspiration Publishing, £12.99.

# We are live again, are you?

15-16 March 2022 NEC Birmingham

**health**  
and wellbeing  
**@work**

The UK's leading event for improving the health, wellbeing and behaviour of today's workforce!

## 18 CPD programmes including:

Mental Health

Emotional Wellbeing

Coaching and Coaching Psychology

Building Resilience

Occupational Psychology

Climate Change

Women's Health

The conference is supported by:



Registration is now open  
Scan the QR code to see  
the full programme

[www.healthwellbeingwork.co.uk](http://www.healthwellbeingwork.co.uk)

