

1992-1999

The Macwhinnie years

After Shirley Cullup's recent historical review of the development of ACW during the early years, **Rick Hughes** interviews Lynn Macwhinnie, past chair of ACW

Q Lynn, what were the challenges you experienced when becoming chair of ACW?

A I joined ACW's executive in 1992 to create and launch the *Counselling at Work* journal and wasn't chair until 1997 – although in retrospect it might not always have seemed like that. Along with being editor I was often the driver or a key player in most initiatives over the preceding five years – especially PR, publishing, marketing and events. This was because before becoming a counsellor, I had worked for years in the film, hospitality and publishing industries, so had relevant transferable experience. I also just get very passionate about the 'vision' thing. Fortunately my predecessors Bridget Wright, Melanie Child and Jacqui Harris and their respective committees were very supportive. And when I was elected chair, everyone came with me. They were wonderful. So with that history, many of the challenges just seemed like more of the same – inspiring people to engage with ACW, meeting member needs, forging relationships, team-building, planning and delivery.

One key issue, though, was the cultural differences and misconceptions between BAC (as was, now BACP) and ACW. We had to accept that for all our business mindset ACW was not a legal entity in its own right, but a BAC division, and there was a real need to create a collaborative and inclusive way of working together. BAC and ACW had to move on from its dysfunctional parent-child interaction and forge an adult-adult relationship; which we did achieve to our mutual benefit, helped by Fay O'Farrell (then BAC's Head of Finance) as the BAC/ACW liaison officer and people such as Anne Stokes and Cathy Carroll who represented ACW on different BAC subcommittees.

A significant point was to ensure ACW positioned BAC (who did not have a marketing department) within the context of ACW members' workplace environments – particularly in the corporate, retail and financial sectors and public services. This informed how the ACW brand was developed, its profile, the media coverage, and its relationships with other related professional membership organisations including EAPA (Employee Assistance Professionals

Association), CIPD (Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development), ECA (European Coaching Association), IOW (Institute of Welfare Officers), and the BAC divisions. We were committed to communicating the message about workplace counselling and counselling skills (a forerunner of coaching) and saw that developing internal and external cross-sector relationships was one way to achieve that

Q Could you chart the developments of ACW during your reign?

A Changes really began to be felt when the decision was taken for ACW to have its own paid office administrator and free up the executive to implement projects. This meant we could streamline systems, ensure quick responses and build relationships so that anything relating to communication with members (advice and support) or outside (eg media) was fielded efficiently and professionally to reflect ACW's core values while hopefully exceeding membership expectations. Marrion Glenn was brilliant in the role and pivotal in helping ACW take its next steps. This gave added value to members, and encouraged their participation in ACW not only within geographic and subject networks, but also in sharing the responsibility for educating and raising awareness of workplace counselling within the purchasing organisations.

One maxim of mine (adopted from somewhere) was that if we had many people each doing a little, we could achieve a lot. And members volunteered on numerous occasions for specific projects or initiatives. Apparently I gained a bit of a reputation in that if anyone suggested anything, they were immediately co-opted to drive the idea – whether it was writing an article, organising a special event arranging ACW's stand at an exhibition, or finding sponsorship. Members were so responsive to getting involved – it was really encouraging and I enjoyed nurturing (or cajoling!) them and everyone benefiting from the results.

We also felt that we had to be proactive outside

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the counselling community. I held the view that as counsellors we could be a tad precious and wouldn't grow if we maintained, metaphorically or literally, a position of being in a small room at the end of an isolated corridor waiting for someone to knock on the door. There needed to be greater integration, which was part of the rationale for ACW's annual conference including non-therapist speakers. That way there was opportunity for cross-fertilisation of opinion and ACW invariably gained new advocates such as Sir Bernard Ingham, Michael Palin, senior executives from organisations such as Boots, BNFL, WH Smith, the House of Lords, CBI, the police force, CPS, Body Shop, BUPA and so on. We wanted to showcase ACW as much as we wanted our members to hear what was happening on the ground and at board level, to realise the impact of the issues that organisations were dealing with (and remind employers that emotional ill-health in employees was often a reflection of the organisation). The conferences were a focal point of the year – an enormous amount of work and hugely successful. We always had fantastic feedback, which would galvanize us for the next one. As to the idea of a reign – that sounds as if it was just me, when it really was not. It was always the team effort.

Q And the key achievements?

A To refresh my memory for this interview, I browsed through back issues of *Counselling at Work* and realised they were a key achievement – not just my polemics (!) but the actual production (carried so skilfully by Ian Macwhinnie) and the calibre of the authors. The journal represented an excellent communication and PR tool, and perhaps does so even more now.

In those seven years we strived to listen to and inform our membership and stand in the shoes of the employing organisations, illustrating how counselling could be integral to company growth, facilitate employer and employee issues, and be flexible enough to respond to emerging needs. So as to achievements, they were many. Apart from the annual conferences, there were one-day special continuing professional development (CPD) conferences with speakers such as Michael Carroll; regional network events and the partnership initiatives such as the ACW and Royal College of Nursing trauma conference; networking with other professional bodies, speaking and/or exhibiting at their events; and gaining corporate sponsorship. Publications in addition to the journal included the first anthology; the membership directory that was

John Whapham's relentless task; Andrew Bull's guidelines on counselling and counselling skills at work; the ACW strategic review; PR literature and materials; and increasing journal subscriptions and advertising. We also generated wide media coverage and corporate support because the ACW executive members were excellent at networking – people like Linda Aspey, Jenny Prestwood, Shirley Cully, Danielle Douglas and Madeleine Mackay who, along with many others, contributed immensely. So really we couldn't help but increase membership, revenue and awareness. Finally, ACW committee members being nominated to the BAC board was a significant step, providing a business perspective to the board, and enabling insight to the challenges and constraints within BAC and ACW. Linden Burdus, head of BootsHelp, who had given ACW much wise counsel, was the first of us to be elected, then me and now Linda is in her second term.

Given that it was mainly volunteer efforts and we could not be masters of our own ship (although we invariably turned a 'can't do' into a 'can do'); everyone can be proud of what they contributed to ACW's legacy and therefore BAC's too.

Q What do you see as the major issues for ACW today?

A Remaining relevant and staying ahead of the game, particularly with the rapid expansion of coaching. It's vital to keep educating organisations about workplace counselling and what its added value is to them; help them see the fit with coaching, as that seems to be what they are buying these days. What research is there on comparative analysis findings in relation to coaching and counselling in terms of cost, focus, efficacy and outcomes? Find champions in the industry sectors ACW members are working in.

ACW is well placed to inform coaching as a profession; everything from referral issues, to supervision, online and telephone work. I think there is a good argument for carving a niche in that market – especially supervision. Many coaches do not understand the nature of what it is, or its value, so the depth of expertise of workplace clients within ACW's membership is a real asset.

Members, though, will go where the work is and their professional body has to reflect the nature of what they do and the context they work in. If members are transferring their skills to the coaching arena, ACW must pay attention to the implications and recognise too what others are doing (eg online organisations) and adopt/adapt any elements that could fit for ACW.

BACP has a fantastic CEO in Laurie Clarke, and BACP/ACW's solid foundations, infrastructure and membership demonstrate levels of experience that are all huge strengths when responsive, flexible and proactive in its influence. BACP is a membership organisation – are ACW members reaching high and wide enough? What issues are facing them? Is change welcomed or perceived as a threat? Are the visionaries focusing on what the future might look like, identifying the cutting edge, considering how the workplace may change? And is anyone listening? While coaching is riding high now, what is coming next? Is therapeutic coaching the way to go? Or is there something that none of us has imagined yet?

Q *Where do you see ACW in five years' time?*

A I have no idea, but I would say be prepared to keep evolving; look how much *Counselling at Work* has – it looks great! We've all seen how rapidly the world of e-networks has influenced communication. Sustainability, spirituality and the soul life of organisations are hotter issues now than when I was writing about this in the journal more than 12 years ago; integration is also a buzz word. Where is ACW on any of this?

Q *Any last points you'd like to add?*

A Well thank you for giving space for some ACW history. I have just two thoughts. There is that phrase in therapy of 'good enough'. Jim Collins in his book *Good to great: analysing corporate success* stated that good was the enemy of great, meaning we settle for less than might be possible and in a sense, play safe to maintain 'good'. How does that resonate with ACW?

In 1998 I invited Professor Brian Thorne to speak about values and spirituality at work at the ACW conference, which he did most eloquently. A summary of his presentation is in *Counselling at Work* issue 21, reprinted in the first *Counselling at Work* anthology. If you read nothing else this week, read that. Therein lay seeds of a vision.

The impact of bullying at work

Damian Stroupe reflects on the emotional fallout from workplace bullying

A client (we'll call him Peter) walks through your door, sits down and tells you about an abusive relationship he is having. The list of issues includes constant criticism, abusive behaviour, isolation from friends, constant monitoring, being 'set up' and being both lied about and to. He sees no way out of his situation and often feels trapped. The other person is popular, stronger and more powerful. Add to this the fact that everything the abuser says is accepted by others to be true.

Peter continues with his story. You begin to understand the physical symptoms he is experiencing: the sleeplessness, weight gain, panic attacks, lack of motivation to do anything. As he explores his feelings, you begin to sense his emotions: anger against himself and his abuser. You also begin to sense Peter's anxiety, isolation, depression, fear, guilt, and his sense of failure that he has let down so many other people. You may begin to sense the effects of post-traumatic stress disorder.

Your mind may be drifting towards a situation at home or school. One thing is missing from this picture and that is support from other people. The client feels he is not being heard by anyone, there is no support. His family is saying 'pull yourself together ... it's all in your mind ... be strong and confront the bully'. Your client's confidence has been shattered, he has no strength to confront the bully and he needs someone to understand what he is going through. If this was school or home, various organisations would act to stop the abuse. However, Peter is talking about his workplace; fear of losing his job and income prevents him from complaining to his employer.

You might be surprised to find that this bullying has been going on for more than a year; you might be more

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