

## **BACP accredited Postgraduate Diploma in Integrative Counselling and Psychotherapy**

The grant given to me by the FPSA paid for the bulk of my academic fees for the final year of the BACP accredited Postgraduate Diploma in Integrative Counselling and Psychotherapy at the University of South Wales. There have been numerous other costs associated with this course (personal therapy, membership of the BACP, insurance, placement costs) so I have been immensely thankful for the monies that were granted to me, enabling me to undertake this training.

### **The training:**

This final year of the Postgraduate Diploma has explored in more depth, the core approaches (humanistic, relational psychodynamic and cognitive behavioural) which make up this integrative qualification. I have now passed the course (subject to final exam board) and have continued to work in two separate counselling agencies with clients, completing 146hrs of practice (exceeding the 100hrs requirement).

As in previous years, the teaching has been a mix of lectures, experiential learning groups, weekly skills triads and additionally this year, case discussion groups (enabling us to reflect upon our client work, with peers and tutors). We have also had specific teaching from external tutors with specialisms in areas such as trauma, bereavement, domestic violence, and bodywork, enabling us to build towards our own professional practice.

At the point at which Covid-19 meant universities needed to close to students, we were able to move online and continued to receive our teaching and group interactions through video conferencing.

I have continued to apply my learning from the course to my working practice with young people who are affected by having a family member with a life-threatening illness. Understanding the connections between our minds, bodies and emotions has proved invaluable when supporting young people who often feel overwhelmed by thoughts, feelings, or physiological responses to their situations. I have also had further opportunities for reflection on how to bring myself, as a practitioner, into the relationship in ways that feel appropriate and safe for clients.

Psychoeducation is integral to the work I undertake and through my placements this year I have become more confident in using it to explain to young people why they feel the way they do, and to reduce the shame and guilt associated with these feelings.

With a core focus of my training being the relationship between myself and client, this has been reflected in my ability to build strong, lasting therapeutic relationships with young people. Being a consistent point of contact during a time in their lives which is dominated by uncertainty is massively important in enabling them to cope, and to build their own internal resilience through their turbulent family situations.

Many of the young people I work with are experiencing mild to moderate mental health issues of their own, most commonly anxiety. The cognitive behavioural part of my training means that I now have a wider range of tools to use with young people, helping them to recognise the impact of their thoughts on their emotions; I am able to support them to learn how to challenge these thoughts and employ strategies to deal with their anxiety. I have been able to share this learning within the wider team in my workplace, so that they are able to use these approaches in their work too.

This year's teaching has also had a strong focus on professional practice, and I have been able to consider the ethics of my work, looking at diversity, inclusion, safe practice, and supervision more closely. We have also undertaken a small scale research project which although I have not needed to draw upon yet, will be useful in my work in the future, should we wish to undertake any research into the efficacy of our work with young people.

I am very grateful for the support of the FPSA throughout my studies. Having it has greatly reduced the pressure on me to take on additional paid work alongside the course, enabling me to pursue my studies in more depth.