**Peter Blundell transcript**

Hello, and welcome to the BACP Communities of Practice podcast.

Welcome to the BACP Communities of Practice podcast series. I'm Rebecca Stew, the Communities of Practice lead, and today I'm joined by Peter Blundell, a therapist from Liverpool who specialises in humanistic person-centred phenomenological and relational therapy. Hi, Peter, could you tell me what led you to becoming a therapist and the areas of practice that you focus on?

Hi, Becks, thanks very much for having me on the podcast. So what drove me to be a therapist in the first place was, I was studying for a psychology degree, my undergraduate, and as I was progressing through that I realised that it wasn't actually giving me any kind of relational schools or in-person skills to work with people. So I decided to seek out a counselling course to see whether I could develop some of those skills. So I started a ten-week counselling course, and it was the first time I'd been introduced to counselling, I hadn't ever experienced counselling before, and I absolutely loved it. I found it really thought-provoking, it was a very short course, and I just carried on and progressed on to the next level of course until I eventually qualified. They were person-centred courses, so I absolutely loved that approach, I've done training in lots of different approaches now, but I always go back to my person-centred roots because it's the skills that I feel like most benefit the majority of clients. So my experience as a therapist, I have worked as a bereavement and grief counsellor, and I've also worked in general counselling agencies as well but I'm now in private practice. I work mainly with adults and my specialist areas of interest are working with clients who experience stress and anxiety, especially in work-based situations, bereavement, grief and loss. So I've done my PhD, which was flaws and boundaries in professional practice, so I do get quite a lot of clients who contact me who are having difficulties in managing boundaries in their own life or in their relationships. I'm also a supervisor, and I offer external supervision for professionals or researchers, not necessarily just therapists, who work in emotionally demanding roles and jobs, so as a form of emotional support to help them with their ethical decision-making and different areas of practice.

Wow, you cover a lot, don't you, in your work?!

Yes, I do!

So your AGM motion in 2020 was the catalyst for the creation of Communities of Practice, could you tell me a bit about where the idea came from and why you decided to suggest it to BACP?

Yes, so I'm also a lecturer at Liverpool John Moores University, I teach on their MA programme in person-centred experiential theory, so I've been doing that for about four years. So I'm connected with lots of different students and I realised that, actually, what students would like as they're training is a community where they can share their experiences, where they can meet other students, where they can get advice and support. I was quite surprised, really, that although BACP did events for students and they had a student conference, what they didn't have was they didn't have a space where students could connect and talk about all the things that were important for them. I'm really aware that when you're a student you want advice that is going to be relevant to what you want to do and that is going to be knowledgeable and come from a knowledgeable place. I thought it was really important, actually, that there was somewhere within BACP that that could be provided for students, and also so that they could have some kind of voice. So I put a motion forward in 2020 to ask if there could be a student forum, somewhere within BACP, to give students an opportunity to create a community for themselves as members, because I think there's about 10,000 new students every year as BACP members. So there's a huge amount of potential there for a community and for different students to have their voice heard.

You've been involved in the development and engagement right from the conception of the project which has recently been launched to the full BACP membership. Has it met your expectations so far?

So I think it's going to be an ongoing project and I think it's come from a good place, I think the right structure is in place, the right team is in place to manage that, but I really think it's going to be over to the members, really, as to whether it meets my expectations and whether members use it. I think there's a lot of potential there for it to grow and evolve, yes, if it's being actively used.

How do you see the platform enhancing counselling and psychotherapy as a practice?

I think because it's only for BACP members, it really means that we can have discussions about changes that we might like to see within BACP, or topics and issues that we wouldn't want to discuss out there on social media but we might want to have a discussion between ourselves as practitioners. So there's a lot of potential there for us to evolve and to create change within the profession. I also think that I know there's been certain communities set up already, like the student community, but there's lots of others already there's unlimited potential there, really, about what the community could be used for. Yes, so I think it could really influence the profession on a wider scale as well if it was fully used and accessed by members.

You're our student champion, as we've touched on earlier, can you let our student members know why they should utilise the Communities of Practice platform?

Yes, as I say, I think there's about 10,000 students every year within BACP approximately, so if all of those students were using the platform there is a huge amount of resource there to be able to be connected to your peers and other students, particularly at a time when they're still learning and evolving around their practice. There's opportunities to make links and networks within the profession itself, so although you might be on the student platform you can dip in and out of the other communities that are on there as well, so you might be able to make other networks and get advice and support. It would be great to identify an established good practice, so within the threads in the Communities of Practice, you're able to vote up the good answers, so be able to see how the community is responding and areas where it's good practice or good ethical decisions could be made or resources or things that might be useful. It will be useful for understanding different student experiences, because not all courses are going to be the same, so it would be good to see and compare how your experiences of training differs from other students. I also think it's really important that, as we're working towards change in the profession, that students from lots of different backgrounds can really offer something new and innovative. So it's not just about finding out what's going on in the profession, I think students are able to actually bring a lot of new perspectives to the profession, particularly around areas of activism and campaigning. So I think the platform will also be a way that students can have a voice within the BACP and also bring together collective action. For example, discussing what students want for their membership fee from BACP, what is it that students are after and think would be useful? That might be able to influence the direction that the BACP takes.

Thank you very much. Is there anything that you would like to ask about the platform?

Well, I suppose I'd like to ask you, Becks, what drew you to becoming involved with the Communities of Practice project in the first place?

Well, I've been very fortunate to spend the last three years as a stay-at-home mum to our three boys and I decided it was time to get back into work earlier this year and joined BACP to lead on the development and the management of the Communities of Practice project. My background is in management and social media and I have an interest in human behaviour after completing a psychology degree in recent years, so being able to work on a project that satisfies a lot of my interests was a very attractive prospect to me and one that gave me a bit of time back to myself again, really.

That's great. What does your role actually involve then? Can you tell the listeners a little bit about that?

Yes. As the lead, I'm the point of contact for all things Communities of Practice. I took over from the previous lead in August this year and have been working with colleagues and developers to ensure that we reached a point where we could successfully launch the platform to members in September. I recruit and meet with the champions on a regular basis and have responsibility for moderation on the platform too. I do occasionally post on the Communities of Practice and signpost to appropriate BACP resources, but I'm taking a very hands-off approach to it all as this has obviously been created by the members for the members. So whilst it's BACP-owned giving that element of security and overview, the intention is to create a safe professional space for members to speak with fellow practitioners.

That's really important, isn't it, and I know that the moderation of comments and things like that are going to be done by members to make sure that it is creating a safe space for as many people as possible. What are your hopes for the project?

So far, the feedback's been really positive from members, so I hope more people will adopt the Communities of Practice early on and come to think of it as a valuable resource within their BACP membership fee. It's slowly evolving into a really rich pot of information now, so I'm hoping that over time more and more members will head there to share best practice and have work-related chats. I've been meeting with members at some recent events as well, and the sense from speaking with them is that being a counsellor can often be quite a lonely isolating experience. Members, they've been saying that they want to find that professional connection, so hopefully the Communities of Practice will offer up that protected space for practitioners to connect and collaborate with people who share their interests and help them feel a little less on their own by doing so. You guys are all out there helping others every day, so hopefully this will go a little way towards helping you.

I think there's loads of potential for that, particularly within the community, and because it's grouped around topical interest there's loads of ways that people can connect with different practitioners, which I think is brilliant. What do you think will make this project a success?

I think to make it a success it really needs the members, like yourself, to engage with the Communities of Practice. Success is going to mean filling each community on the platform with interesting topics of discussion and thought-provoking questions so that that wealth of knowledge just organically grows and becomes the place members head to when they need to find something out or maybe discuss what happened within their work day, just with someone who will understand it a little bit better. We've got a growing number of categories on there now, from addiction and compulsive behaviour, to ecotherapy, there's bereavement, neurodiversity. There's already a lot on there to get involved in, but then on the other hand, if there's an area that is missing, members can get in touch with me as there's a rolling recruitment of champions and we want members to feel involved in the development and the successes BACP has. So if anybody listening does want to get involved and they have some new ideas, they can email me at communities@bacp.co.uk and we can have a chat about them becoming a champion. I just want to say a big thank you, Peter, to you for being a guest on the first episode, and thank you for putting the motion in, it's really developing into something quite special. It's been really interesting to hear your journey about how one person's idea has evolved into this fantastic resource.

Oh thank you very much, I appreciate that, and I look forward to seeing how it develops and evolves with members' engagement.

Thank you.

Thank you for listening to the BACP Communities of Practice podcast, we hope you enjoyed it. Don't forget, you can get in touch via communities@bacp.co.uk if you'd like more information on how to get involved with the Communities of Practice platform.