

Sevenoaks Counselling

a professional service offered by Christians
to the whole community



Newsletter Autumn 2017

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LONELINESS

I have just learned of the findings of a new national commission which was planned by West Yorkshire MP Jo Cox before she was murdered in June of last year and launched this January. Investigating loneliness in the UK, this commission has found that a fifth of the population privately admits they are *always* or *often* lonely. The breakdown of family life as well as time spent on social networks could well be relevant here.

Loneliness is a silent epidemic affecting people of all ages and backgrounds in our country and its prevalence is right here on our doorsteps, often so hidden that we may well be unaware of it or too busy to notice it even amongst our friends. To be deprived of meaningful



relationships and to sink into that chasm of loneliness is devastating. It's something that could happen to anyone in a whole variety of situations: a young child, an adolescent, a parent, someone in the throes of a bereavement, people in work or newly retired or in their 'senior' years. Loneliness can lead to depression and to suicidal thoughts or to the act itself.

Our counsellors, I am sure, are aware of loneliness buried within the troublesome issues which clients present to them and it is our hope and prayer that their counselling plays a part in its alleviation.

But what can the rest of us do? Do we need to be nudged into being more frequent encouragers of others? Sometimes it does not take more than a kind word, a smile or a simple and genuine statement of appreciation to convey the message that someone actually cares and to lift a person's spirits away from negativity, self-absorption and feelings of loneliness into something more positive.

For Christians 'loving our neighbours' is central to the outworking of our faith and, of course, many of those who would not call themselves Christians set very good examples of people who love, respect and help their 'neighbours'. However, within the busyness life, any of us can fail to show in any active way our concern for others; like the

priest and the Levite in Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan, we may perhaps instead 'pass by on the other side'.

Our dedicated team of counselors with Julie Smith at its helm need and value support and prayer as they seek to meet the needs of their clients.

As we remember them, we also want to give thanks for Claudine Gavin's 25 years of faithful service, for Janet McGrath, our administrator, with her team of volunteers and for you, our much valued supporters. All are doing a great deal to help others and I believe we are all needed to play some part in tackling the issue of loneliness which the national commission has highlighted for us.

Wendy Billington, Trustee

GOODBYE WITH LOVE

After more than 25 years working with Sevenoaks Counselling, I decided that the time had come for new challenges and more time with the grandchildren. It has not been an easy decision as I have found the work with clients rewarding and enriching.



I have loved working with amazing colleagues. I have so many wonderful memories, seeing the service grow and develop. I will miss belonging to such a supportive organisation and part of my heart will stay at the Bridge.

MICHELE PALMER



When I was asked to introduce myself for this Newsletter, I began to reflect on the experiences that brought me to join the team here at Sevenoaks Counselling.

My journey began at Burrswood Christian Hospital, through my role, for the last ten years, as a volunteer steward at the Healing Services. I realised that I struggled to know what to say to people that were in great emotional or physical pain, and so I decided to do a counselling skills certificate – and haven't looked back since.

I remember asking for God's help at the beginning of my journey seven years ago, and he has been present all the way – his timing not always mine but, looking back, always perfect.

I qualified as an Integrative Counsellor from the Wealden Institute in Crowborough in 2014. Since then, I have completed a placement in an IAPT service (Improving Access to Psychological Therapies – an NHS service started in 2008) and in a children's service offering counselling to parents; set up my own private practice; volunteered regularly at The Hub, a mental health resource centre in Tunbridge Wells; and run a parenting course.

Receiving the offer to join the team at Sevenoaks Counselling is incredibly exciting and I am looking forward to experiencing what Christian values can bring into professional counselling.

COMINGS AND GOINGS

Having said good bye to Claudine Gavin, one of the longest serving counsellors, and welcomed Michele Palmer, we have now appointed a Play Therapist. This is a new venture for Sevenoaks Counselling but definitely feels the right move. We are having increasing numbers of children, teenagers and families coming for help - Catherine Rodger, our Family Therapist, is very busy as are those of us who work with young people. Siobhán Fagan is bringing new skills and ways of working that will be particularly helpful in working with pre-school and primary age children and we welcome her.

Jean Day, Counsellor

SIOBHAN FAGAN

My name is Siobhán Fagan and I am absolutely thrilled to be joining the team at Sevenoaks Counselling. Originally from Ireland, I settled in Sevenoaks three years ago. Whilst living in Ireland, I completed my Degree in English and Human Development. I then went on to complete a Masters in Child, Family and Community Studies. Since moving to Sevenoaks, I have completed a Masters in Play Therapy, from the University of Roehampton, London.



Play Therapy provides an opportunity for children to express, explore and make sense of difficult life experiences. Children often struggle to find the words to express their thoughts and feelings. In Play Therapy, children use play as their primary form of communication. Play Therapy is an effective intervention for a variety of emotional and/or behavioural difficulties which children may present having experienced trauma, abuse, neglect, loss, etc.

Annual Open Meeting – 7 June 2017

A good number of our supporters assembled at St Mary's Kippington Parish Centre for our Annual Open Meeting on 7 June. It was the eve of the General Election so it was hardly surprising that our MP, Sir Michael Fallon, had sent apologies. We were, however, pleased to welcome the Town Mayor of Sevenoaks, Councillor Maxine Chakowa. Our Treasurer, Chris Stiven, presided and began by welcoming all present with a particular welcome to Allison Summers, the guest speaker.

Julie Smith - Head of Counselling

This was the first appearance at an Annual Meeting of Julie Smith who succeeded Maureen King as Head of Counselling last year. Julie began her report by referring to the Service of Commissioning held at Christ Church URC on 2 November 2016. Bishop James, Bishop of Rochester and one of our Patrons, had offered to come to Sevenoaks to commission Julie as Head of Counselling and Janet McGrath as Service Administrator. In Julie's words it proved to be a very special occasion for all of us.

Julie continued by emphasising that Sevenoaks Counselling was committed to providing confidential and professional counselling to all who needed it, irrespective of their ability to pay. There were currently 11 part time counsellors plus a Family Therapist. Sadly one of our longest-serving counsellors, Claudine Gavin, would be leaving shortly but a replacement counsellor would be appointed. Julie paid tribute to Janet McGrath, the Service Administrator, and her team of volunteers without whom the organisation would not function as efficiently as it does.

Sevenoaks Counselling continued its important subsidiary role in the provision of Continuing Professional Development courses and also offered a workshop to foster 'Peaceful Parenting'. (For details please see our website.) Recent developments included the provision of new computers, a new office desk and new chairs for clients and counsellors. The chairs were funded from a special grant negotiated through Margaret Crabtree, County Councillor. In conclusion Julie put on record our thanks to all the churches and individual donors who make our work possible, to Sevenoaks District Council and Sevenoaks Town Council for their grants, and particularly to Christ Church URC for allowing the use of our premises rent free.

Chris Stiven -Treasurer

In his financial report, Chris Stiven also paid tribute to our many financial supporters who enabled us to close the gap between our expenditure (£91,200 in the year ending 31 January 2017) and the income received from clients (£59,100 in the same period).

Although a number of clients paid very little or sometimes nothing for their counselling, more were able to pay the full recommended amount of £45. The facility to pay by bank transfer for counselling sessions had been introduced together with the acceptance of credit and debit cards, all of which, it was hoped, would lead to an increase in our income.

Allison Summers - Guest Speaker

Our guest speaker for the evening, Allison Summers, then introduced her subject 'Addictions', drawing on the very considerable experience she has had as a member of staff of Kenward Trust (which provides residential care and other forms of support for those affected by alcohol and substance abuse). She emphasised that addiction affected a wide range of people in society including well known public figures who have died as a result of addiction. Tobacco addiction was still a problem despite the reduction in the number of smokers. Alcohol she described as 'mainstream' and individuals could, without realising the consequences, increase their consumption: two glasses of wine at a meal leading to three and so on until addiction sets in. Addiction was not only caused by binge drinking.

The consequences of addiction had a profound effect on the NHS; drinking to excess resulted in a vast number of admissions to A and E. But there were other effects such as weight-gain and rapid ageing which also impacted on the NHS. The positive benefits of cannabis were sometimes publicised but there were also dangers.

The journey to dependency often started with experiment followed by recreational use, which might include taking so-called 'party drugs'. Dependency usually resulted from a compulsion to continue taking a drug to feel good or to avoid feeling bad. This could be brought about as a result of bereavement or other crisis in a person's life. There should be an awareness that it is natural to feel pain and grief; it is not a reason for taking drugs or drinking to excess.

In conclusion Allison spoke about the signs to look for to detect addiction and the ways addiction can be treated. The harsh reality was that addicts were often resistant to change and attempts to treat them resulted in failure. It was important to establish the reasons for wanting help; the person really has to want to change.

Stephen Day, Trustee

WE LIKE CHANGE!

Apparently the best one-liner at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe this year was the following from comedian Ken Cheng: *'I'm not a fan of the new pound coin, but then again, I hate all change.'* Well, a little bit of change makes a big difference at SC. Specifically, the shortfall we need to cover from donations and grants depends on the difference between the average cost of providing each counselling session and the average amount contributed by the clients. As some clients can afford very little, we rely on those who can afford it to bring up the average amount. The average cost of providing each session last year was £35.50, and the average client contribution was £23.01, leaving a shortfall of £12.49 per session, or £32,100. It is too early to say what the average cost of providing each session



Illustration by Chris Gash

will be for the full current year, but it is pleasing to note that the average client contribution is currently running at about £24.02, only about a pound more than last year, but if it's sustained, it could make it easier to make up the shortfall.

We provided some 1,435 counselling sessions during this period, slightly fewer than during the same period of the previous financial year, but that extra £1.01 per session, together with donations from churches and individuals, and other income has enabled us to do just slightly better than break even at the half way mark.

Chris Stiven, Treasurer

An Autobiography in Five Short Chapters by Portia Nelson

Chapter 1

I walk down the street.
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.
I fall in.
I am lost ... I am helpless.
It isn't my fault.
It takes forever to find a way out.

Chapter 2

I walk down the same street.
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.
I pretend I don't see it.
I fall in again.
I can't believe I am in the same place.
But, it isn't my fault.
It still takes a long time to get out.

Chapter 3

I walk down the same street.
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.
I see it is there.
I still fall in ... it is a habit.
My eyes are open.
I know where I am.
It is my fault.
I get out immediately.

Chapter 4

I walk down the same street.
There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.
I walk around it.

Chapter 5

I walk down another street.



This poem can be very useful in helping people to understand and work at making changes in their lives.
Portia Nelson (1920-2001) was an American singer, songwriter, actress and author.

Counselling Team:

Julie Smith
(Head of Counselling)
Jennifer Adams
Jeanette Archer
Laura Daniels
Jean Day
Siobhán Fagan
Steve Fearn
Rachel Ferguson-Gow
Alan Forman

Michele Palmer
Nicci Paramor
Andrew Procter
Catherine Rodger

Admin Team:

Janet McGrath
(Service Administrator)
Frank Amott
Rosie Dalton
Trevor Jones

Carine Stinglhamber

Trustees:

Wendy Billington
Anne Bourne
Gill Clayton
Stephen Day
Chris Stiven
(Treasurer)
Jean Watson
Mary Wright

