The Role of the Voluntary Counselling Agency

Presentation to the Cross Party Group on Mental Health
Scottish Parliament
13 March 2013

The PF is a large, generic counselling agency – an Edinburgh-based registered charity for the past 27 years. We offer counselling and psychotherapy to adults, irrespective of their background, issues, or their ability to pay.

Through our work in 1:1 counselling, we believe the PF is actually a driver of social change and economic development, as well as personal wellbeing. Our work impacts directly on the resilience of the communities in which our clients live. We offer support that can transform someone from being distressed, a burden to family and friends, and a cost to society, into a full contributor to the life of Scotland.

Our counselling service can, and has, enabled clients to
- recover or develop positive mental health and wellbeing
- resolve issues that were having a profound impact on their family, and re-establish happy personal lives - thereby improving the wellbeing and futures of their children
- re-engage with full employment
- re-enter the community life from which they had become distanced.

This year we will offer around 12,000 sessions to approximately 600 clients – with roughly 300 clients attending the PF each week. The Service is delivered through 93 volunteer counsellors (all professionally trained, with 80% fully qualified to at least diploma level – clinically supervised by our team of 11 supervisors). Administratively, we are supported by a team of 15 volunteer receptionists and a small staff team of 4.

All of our clients come to us through ‘self-referral’ – although most are signposted to us:
Over 40% by their GP or other NHS contact.

Presenting issues are wide-ranging, and it is probably fair to say that virtually every one of our clients has some degree of depression and/or anxiety – with a marked increase in recent years of co-morbidity, and clients presenting with more severe and complex mental health problems, some with psychiatric diagnoses of schizophrenia, bi-polar, borderline personality disorder etc. In recent months we have also, understandably, seen a significant increase in the number of cases of historical Childhood Sexual Abuse.

In accepting all clients signposted to us by their GP, we are contributing to a reduction in the time and support required by GPs and other Health Services, whilst also providing an alternative ‘referral’ option and enhancing “patient choice”.

Our early intervention can also help prevent deterioration and the need for later referral to Psychology or Psychiatry services (both of which also send their patients to us!).
Our counselling support is also helping to reduce the need for prescribed medication (anti-depressants in particular) – whether as an alternative to medication in the first place, or support to reduce or come off medication altogether.

We are contributing to the Scottish Government’s ‘See Me’ anti-stigma campaign by ‘de-medicalising’ mild to moderate mental health problems, through the provision of talking therapies in a non-NHS, community-based, healing environment. Similarly, our work is contributing to other national mental health priorities, such as the Choose Life campaign to reduce suicide, and the provision of support for Recovery.

Furthermore, we are helping our clients to develop inner resources to cope with life challenges, both during and after therapy – thereby enabling a return to Employment and reducing Benefits costs, and other demands for scarce resources.

These national mental health benefits are all a consequence of our 1:1 counselling service, and not something we are directly funded for - so let me say a word about our funding…

It costs almost £200K per year to run the PF at the moment, despite being resourced almost entirely by volunteers. Of this, the majority comes from donations made by clients for each session. The amount they offer is negotiated individually at the start of counselling, and can be a pound or two, or even nothing. However, most donate between £5 and £20, and this is crucial to our financial survival. We receive just £30k per year from NHS Lothian, through a Service level Agreement.

We really value our volunteers. This slide illustrates that if we paid our 93 counsellors less than half the private rate per session (eg. £20) for the 12,000 sessions a year – the true cost of the service would be closer to £1/2m. And if we were to pay our counsellors a more realistic £50 an hour, and our volunteer receptionists just £10 an hour, the cost of the Service would be close to £1m!

Hence, even at the most modest rates, we are delivering around £1\2m worth of value, towards which the total Public Sector contribution is £30k pa - that’s 7% of total value – less than one third of a GP’s salary?

We have 93 volunteers, 80% qualified and the rest on Student Placements – a training that costs individuals typically £20K or more, with very little funding support available. And after the training, in Scotland there is hardly any paid employment available – the culture and expectation being that counsellors will work on a voluntary basis. What other profession would expect their members to give so completely freely of their time and expertise?!

We encourage all of our counsellors to be members of one of the relevant Professional Organisations, and ensure that all work to the ethical guidelines provided by their own Professional Body.

And as an organisation, we are closely linked with COSCA, the Professional Body for Counselling and Psychotherapy in Scotland.

I cannot overstate the importance of the guidance and support we receive from COSCA. Deeply embedded in the social and political life of Scotland, COSCA develops and supports standards & practices for the counselling profession in this country.
The PF is proud to have gained the coveted, formal Recognition from COSCA several years ago – the ‘kitemark’ for quality standards and practice in our profession.

The COSCA Recognition scheme provides an important level of support to all concerned, including:
- Public / client protection, reassurance and confidence - through quality assurance and ‘higher body’ oversight
- Public commitment to:
  - high standards
  - ethical, safe practice &
  - Continuous development - staying up to date with social/political/legal changes

I thought I would leave the final words to our clients. Overall, our Client evaluation gives us very positive feedback. In the past 6 months, 97% of clients gave the highest rating of “very good” or “good” (89% very good) – and said they would use us again and refer others.

Finally, in the words of one of our funding supporters – someone who had been able to access, and had benefited from counselling elsewhere:

“I can remember very clearly what that first big set-back felt like. Suddenly, life was unfair and directionless. The gloom felt uncontrollable, physical. I was lucky. Thoughtful counselling helped me out of that state remarkably quickly. With renewed confidence, I was able to move on to fresh challenges. That experience sparked my interest in the work of the PF Counselling Service.”

And he has continued to support us for many years now – through his belief, in line with ours, that everyone should have access to counselling – not just the fortunate few who are able to afford to pay for private counselling. And this is what the PF is all about.

Alison Hampton
Director

Slides from the presentation are available at:

http://www.slideshare.net/pfcounselling/pf-counselling-scottish-parliament-13mar13-17192210
Overview of PF

12,000 counselling sessions offered
635 clients in total over 12 months
300 clients each week
93 volunteer counsellors: accredited, qualified and students
15 volunteer receptionists
11 professional supervisors
7 counselling rooms
4 staff
### Referral Sources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GP</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>36.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other NHS Service</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Services</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>181</td>
<td><strong>40.2%</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friend</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Counselling Agency</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>10.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet Search</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Returning Client</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employer</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Voluntary Organisation</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Presenting Issues

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal/Relationship</td>
<td>255</td>
<td>16.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety/Stress</td>
<td>231</td>
<td>14.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depression</td>
<td>227</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self Esteem</td>
<td>202</td>
<td>12.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bereavement/Loss</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>10.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trauma/Abuse</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>6.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work/Academic</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living/Welfare</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addictions</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eating Disorder</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychosis</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Early Intervention

Financial Survival

Costs
Staff, Supervision, Premises, Office

£200,000

Funding
Client Donations & Gift Aid  136,200
NHS Lothian  30,000
Trusts and other donations  18,300
Other income  15,500

£200,000
Valuing Volunteering

**Professional Counselling**
12,000 hours @ £20/hr  £240,000

**Cash Costs**
Staff, Supervision, Premises, etc  £200,000

**Public Funding**
NHS Lothian  £30,000
(1/3 of a GP salary?)

7% of total value!!

Volunteer Counsellors
Counselling Modalities

- Person Centred
- Psychodynamic
- Transactional Analysis (TA)
- Psychosynthesis
- Process Oriented
- Integrative
- Gestalt
- Transpersonal
- Counselling Psychology
- Core Process

Counsellor Accreditation

Scotland's Professional Body for Counselling & Psychotherapy

British Association for Counselling & Psychotherapy

NHS Lothian

CRBS

UKCP
Organisational Recognition

COSCA - Setting standards for counselling and psychotherapy in Scotland

PF Counselling Service is a COSCA Recognised organisation, which helps ensure:

- Client protection and reassurance
- Public recognition of our commitment to
  - high standards
  - ethical, safe practice
  - keeping up-to-date with policy and practice
  - continuous improvement

Client Comments

“I'm happier now than I'd ever thought I could be, and I can make friends, which I could never do before. I don't have panic attacks anymore.”

“I gained confidence, I got a new job and I have more faith in my decisions. I think coming to PF was the best decision I've made.”

“I'd reached a point at which I felt life was not worth living. I don’t think I can quantify the many ways in which I've benefited from the PF's help.”

“I feel more confident, calmer, less stressed.”