

The CCC encourages all volunteers to reach their potential in whatever direction their strengths and interests lie. Many are surprised at their own development and achievements.

Case study 1 – counsellor

One of our past counsellors started as a welcomer and also managed the community shop. She had no job when she first moved to Milton Keynes from London and says:

'As a practising counsellor, I didn't want to work for any agency without knowing what they were about. It was by being a welcomer that I learned what's around Milton Keynes in terms of counselling. I have also recruited volunteers when managing the community shop. Often volunteers arrive feeling very socially isolated and with their self-esteem on the floor. It's so rewarding to see their confidence grow and to know that their volunteering role was often a stepping stone back to normal life. My own potential was seen before I realised it myself and I developed far beyond my expectations.'

Case study 2 – bereavement counsellor and welcomer

A former client is now a trained bereavement counsellor working for a member organisation and planning further training next year. She also works as a welcomer, doing several shifts a week on reception, including a drop-in. She says:

'I first became involved with the CCC as a client and received counselling for two years. One of my major issues was being too scared to leave my own home, so when I entered the CCC for the first time I was relieved to find it such a warm and friendly place. I have a lot to be thankful for and so do many others in Milton Keynes for having such a wonderful local counselling centre.'

CCC's ability to respond within a set timescale, with everyone without exception rising to the occasion and giving 110 per cent to achieve a high standard of practice for clients. Its impact on the Centre as a whole has been considerable, with the need to accommodate at least 120 more clients per week together with a comprehensive administrative system.

The CCC's vision is as follows: 'We are helping people to move forward to achieve emotional wellbeing – valuing everyone's life skills, experience and individuality, to enable positive change.' Our clients experience this vision in action. Success for the PCT service clients is indicated by continuing significant positive results from the clinical evaluation. The counsellors involved in the PCT service have enjoyed the work and, despite the challenge of the workload, the service is a positive experience for the whole Centre, reaffirming the team spirit which is such a significant feature of the CCC. We were delighted to be awarded the Excellence in Counselling and Psychotherapy Practice Award at the BACP Counselling and Psychotherapy Awards 2009, in recognition of the PCT service's success.

In a survey of our PCT service clients, 100 per cent of those who responded gave the CCC full marks for providing a welcoming, safe and non-clinical environment. Below are some of the comments written by clients:

'I was very sceptical when I first came but I have been proved wrong as this has been very beneficial to me in respect of my problems.'

'My counsellor was fantastic – she understood my thoughts and feelings better than anyone I have ever met in my life – her time is priceless.'

'I was able to understand my anxiety was not me going mad but due to unfortunate events that had happened to me in my past. It has helped me face the past and given me strength to go forward.'

Moving forward

Continuing development of services, ongoing funding pressures and the overwhelming response to the PCT Service have all had a major impact on this very small, local voluntary organisation over the years. With no national framework, infrastructure or

personnel to share the workload, the future of the CCC has always depended on the ongoing commitment and loyalty of a handful of part-time staff and its many dedicated volunteers.

The recession is expected to have a marked effect on the CCC, with more people seeking help to deal with the effects of stress and depression, alongside a likely reduction in council and government funding. It is going to be even more challenging for the CCC to provide its current range of services over the next few years, but we hope to be able to continue to build on our current success for the future.

Conclusion

It is difficult to capture in an article the many and various facets of our organisation and the contribution it makes to a new development like Milton Keynes. For all of us who work here it has been a source of inspiration, support and motivation. We hope that it has provided a positive and beneficial experience for clients and member organisations over the years. We also hope that everyone feels their contribution is valued and that they have been instrumental in helping so many people grow, develop and recover from life's experiences. Personally, I have felt both humble and privileged to be part of such a vibrant and creative organisation which has made such a difference to the mental health of the people of Milton Keynes. ■

Diana Savage grew up locally, seeing many changes take place as Milton Keynes developed. As a qualified social worker, she worked within healthcare for many years, joining the new hospital team when MK hospital opened in 1984. She has managed the City Counselling Centre since its opening in 1992 and has welcomed the opportunity to help to create services for people who are often displaced from their support network by their move to this new town.

Reader response

HCPJ welcomes feedback on this article. If you would like to contact the author, please email Diana at ccc.manager@btinternet.com. To contact HCPJ, please email hcpj.editorial@bacp.co.uk