

Introduction to Trainee Counsellor Placements

Revised April 2010

1 Introduction - PGCS

Palace Gate Counselling Service (PGCS) has, for almost 12 years been providing a respected, high quality counselling service to all in need, without discrimination and irrespective of a clients ability to pay (clients make a payment according to their means). Potential clients refer themselves (often following a recommendation from a GP or some other agency). An initial interview takes place and a counsellor then allocated. Clients then work with the same counsellor on a weekly basis. We offer counselling for both short and medium term work and longer term therapy. We currently have an establishment of 25 counsellors and demand is such that we are usually full.

2 Recent changes at PGCS

In September 2003, the parent Charity (Exeter Community Initiatives (ECI)) closed PGCS as it had not been able to secure adequate funding for the project. The voluntary Director & Assistant Director therefore decided to take on the counselling service and run it directly. A new not-for-profit company was formed (Phoenix Counselling Services) to provide the legal umbrella under which PGCS could continue to operate. ECI agreed to move out from the office suite which the counselling service had shared, to allow PGCS to continue to operate from the ideal premises at Palace Gate. We reopened a week after the closure and began operating under these new arrangements on 8th October 2003.

3 What does PGCS offer?

PGCS deals with an almost unlimited range of emotional difficulties: depression, anxiety, stress, childhood & adult abuse, victims of crime, loss, relationships, etc. The service is available to all, without discrimination of race, class, culture, gender, disability, religion, sexual orientation or ability to pay. PGCS has come to be seen as a major provider of good quality counselling.

We also offer a limited amount of 'couples work' and also provide 'External Supervision' to those needing on-going support in the workplace. There is also a pilot project based in Newton Abbot. (*Trainee Counsellors are not involved in these operations*).

Counsellors

PGCS counsellors are all volunteers (as are the Director & Assistant Director). Counsellors offer a minimum of one session (being a morning, afternoon or evening) during which they see up to three clients. Counselling takes place at our Palace Gate offices.

What are PGCS offering to trainees?

Setting

Firstly an ideal setting, in a professional counselling agency. We have a self contained office suite with 4 pleasant dedicated counselling rooms, office, small counsellors rest room etc. We operate on a show-string, but the premises are ideally located and the counselling rooms as good as you are likely to find anywhere. All of the rooms are fitted with panic alarms and there are procedures in place to safeguard your safety. There is a free, limitless supply of tea, coffee (etc.) & chocolate biscuits!

Client vetting

All clients are vetted by an experienced counsellor before they would be allocated to you. We now have considerable experience in helping trainees through their placement year and do our best to ensure that the clients allocated are appropriate to your current experience level and that your exposure to clients is regulated at the beginning of your placement to help you find your feet at an appropriate rate.

Insurance

You will be covered by our insurance for all client work at PGCS. This cover is provided free to our counsellors, so you will not need to arrange your own insurance.

Supervision

Supervision is provided in house and again is free to counsellors. It is an absolute requirement to undertake this. For trainees on BACP courses we offer 1½ hours of supervision a month in a mixture of individual and group. This is offered free of charge. Our aim is to support you as fully as is possible.

Professional development

Your supervision group is one important form of ongoing professional development, but in addition we also try to provide some professional development

sessions during the year to help us focus on particular areas of interest.

What do PGCS expect from you?

Professional standards

At PGCS we do not equate 'voluntary' with 'amateur'. We strive to maintain the highest professional standards in all that we do. When selecting counsellors to work with PGCS we look for people committed to working in a professional way and we expect that professionalism to carry on from face to face client work into paperwork and the following of administrative procedures.

PGCS is an organisational member of BACP.

Time commitment

You must be prepared to commit to working with us for a session a week for a minimum of a year. When (if) you leave then you must properly complete work with clients you have already started. You must act in accordance with the PGCS policies which include the BACP code of ethics.

What counsellors are PGCS looking for?

Course

Firstly you must be on (or about to start) an acknowledged Diploma level counselling course. We would usually only take students during their final year of the Diploma, unless there were special circumstances.

Therapeutic model

PGCS is committed to the provision of non-directive client centred counselling / therapy. Whilst some of our counsellors use a variety of approaches, we would be unlikely to appoint counsellors who used a therapeutic model which we felt to be in conflict with our core approach.

Isn't Palace Gate a Christian organisation?

The Counselling service was founded by members of the Churches in Exeter, who find their motivation and commitment from within the Christian faith. It is not however a 'Christian counselling' service. Nor do you have to be a Christian to work as part of it. However we would expect you to be aware of a spiritual dimension and how that might relate to work with clients and be sympathetic and respectful of our roots as an agency.

Safe AND effective

We recognise fully that you may be at the beginning of your counselling career and your placement is part of that learning process. At the same time we need to be happy at all times that you are likely to be able to practice in a way that is both 'safe' and may reasonably be expected to be 'effective'. We will support you to the hilt once you are a member of our team, but we always reserve the right to put a pause on the allocation of clients to you, or even to terminate the placement if, in our view, this criteria cannot be met at the time.

Making ends meet

We struggle to make ends meet at PGCS (like most voluntary sector organisations). One of the downsides to an organisation which has the 'feel' of an 'established professional organisation' is that people sometimes assume it is other than what it is. It is, at the bottom line, a group of volunteers, committed to providing good quality counselling to those who otherwise could not access it. You need to be able to enter into and embrace that commitment and the ethos that goes with it, in an organisation where we all pull together to ensure this valuable service continues.

6 Some questions we are often asked

Do you pay expenses?

We would love to be more generous than we can afford to be. This is what we do at the moment:

i) for the first 6 months of your placement you get NO travel or car park expenses. You can claim for Postage, phone calls etc .

ii) after 6 months, until you get your Diploma, you will be paid mileage at the rate of 25p per mile for a maximum of 30 miles round trip, together with the least expensive car parking option available (e.g. Park & Ride schemes), or your public transport fare, when you are coming in for your counselling session. You do not receive expenses travelling to supervision or professional development sessions.

iii) Once you get your Diploma, you can also claim expenses travelling for Supervision & Professional development sessions.

How many clients do you see?

Each volunteer counsellor donates a minimum of half a day a week during which time they see 3 clients. We are currently working with over 100 clients a week.

What hours do you operate?

Monday to Friday 9.00 to 5.00pm plus three evenings, a total of 48 hours per week.

Where are clients referred from?

All clients are 'self-referred', in that they make the initial contact with us themselves. We are therefore completely 'open-access'. However, analysis of who recommended they come to PGCS, (in that sense who 'referred' them) showed sources of referral as follows: GP's (59%), Community Mental Health Team (6%), Other Health Agencies (2%), Other organisations – Samaritans etc (5%), Word of mouth (15%), Saw a leaflet (6%), Yellow Pages (1%), Don't know (6%).

How long can counselling last?

At the initial interview it is decided whether to offer **fixed term counselling** or **open ended therapy**. 'Fixed term' in our terms means a limit of 10 weeks. 'Open-ended' lasts typically 6-9 months although sometimes such work can last for eighteen months or more. Some of our referrals are from agencies who recognise that the client they are working with needs longer term work than they are able to provide.