

## Introduction to Trainee Counsellor Placements rev May 2018

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### 1 Introduction - PGCS

Palace Gate Counselling Service (PGCS) has, since 1994, 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 PGCS - History

PGCS was one of the initiatives which grew out of the 'Palace Gate Project'. The Project was founded by members of the Churches in Exeter. In time the 'Palace Gate Project' was formed into a Charity (Exeter Community Umbrella) which then in turn became 'Exeter Community Initiatives (ECI)'. In 2003 ECI made the decision to close PGCS as it had not been able to secure adequate funding for the project. The then voluntary Director & Assistant Director took on the counselling service from this point, to ensure the continuation of the service. A new not-for-profit company was formed (Phoenix Counselling Services). This provides 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 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. All of our clients are self-referring adults. We do not offer counselling to young people under the age of 18 or to those defined as 'vulnerable adults' under the law.

We also offer a limited amount of 'couples work' and also provide 'External Supervision' to those needing on-going support in the workplace.

### 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 (more recently we added a 5<sup>th</sup> room elsewhere in the building which we use for overflow and small groups), office, small counsellors rest room /library 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. The counselling 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.

### **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 and practices.

## **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. We see

ourselves as a 'community' of therapists. 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.

can last for eighteen months or more. Some of our clients come onto us having worked in a more restricted time-limited way with other agencies first.

## **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 traveling to supervision or professional development sessions.
  
- iii)** Once you get your Diploma, you can also claim expenses traveling 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 150 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 do the clients come from?**

All clients are 'self-referring', in that they make the initial contact with us themselves. We are therefore completely 'open-access' and clients find out about us through a whole variety of different routes.

### **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

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\*Palace Gate Counselling Service (PGCS)  
Is a trading name of  
Phoenix Counselling Services  
A not-for profit company limited by guarantee  
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