

From the President

Professor Lynne Gabriel OBE, President of BACP

‘Generating employment opportunities for counsellors and therapists is a topic close to my heart’

It's great to have our new CEO, Phil James, settling into his role along with our new Director of Professional Standards, Policy and Research, Lisa Morrison Coulthard. Both joined us in December 2023, complementing BACP's senior leadership team to bring about a steady period for the Association. Welcoming new colleagues chimes well with the month of March, which signifies transitioning from winter to spring. It's so joyful to see new shoots blossoming. Symbolic of the cycle of life, it reminds us how, even in those seemingly fallow winter months, life and growth continue. As a metaphor for change, this inevitable transition offers a lens through which to consider new growth in the world of counselling and psychotherapy.

One such point of change and transformation is represented in a much-needed conceptual shift that could take us beyond decolonisation, as discussed in 'Reshaping the *Ethical Framework*' in this issue. Moving through and beyond colonialism into relational and ethical landscapes in which human diversities and differences are acknowledged, valued and respected is crucial. We have recently seen outstanding contributions to the profession's knowledge base from colleagues including Dwight Turner and Myira Khan, who have sown seeds for something that I hope to see evolving in my lifetime - global communities in which annihilation of others is anathema to human being, living and relating. Khan's concept of 'working within' diversity and difference is helpful and reminds us that the notion 'working with' leaves scope for othering or simply box-ticking to denote acknowledgment of equality, diversity and inclusion. Moderating and mediating this change is multigenerational work that requires ongoing commitment from the profession.

Another important transition is also in progress. Increasing attention is being directed

towards the UK cost of living crisis and its impact on citizens. BACP Vice President Luciana Berger has been involved in work to aid disenfranchised citizens struggling to cope with living costs. With BACP actively campaigning to support those struggling financially, including members of our Association training or working in the counselling professions, this topic continues to be an important area in which our Association is active.

With nearly four in 10 energy bill payers struggling to afford payments,¹ disposable income for wellbeing activities is eroded. Significantly, the cost of living situation highlights the challenge that many clients will face when seeking therapy. Unless they work in an organisation that offers workplace counselling or an employment assistance programme, or can access free therapy through GP practices or the NHS Talking Therapies programme, investing in therapy is a tough decision for clients where provision of core essentials such as food and fuel is a priority.

Generating employment opportunities for counsellors and therapists is a topic close to my

heart. There are increasing examples of therapists taking entrepreneurial and creative approaches to navigating their therapy career, like those featured in 'The big issue' in this edition. Adopting a portfolio approach to a career allows therapists to choose components that reflect their values and interests. Of course, not everyone will want to work in this way, and some may be concerned about the risks of self-employment or setting up in a therapy-related business. When I started out, counsellor employment was non-existent and portfolio working was inevitable. It was a tricky moment as I was not ready to set up in private practice. Nonetheless, over the years I did manage to create a rewarding portfolio of training, private practice, consultancy and volunteering, which ultimately led to a university teaching and research role.

Times are changing in relation to the availability of paid work for therapists, and there are increasing employment opportunities, but they continue to be insufficient and occur in an unco-ordinated way. I have written previously that I believe statutory regulation could positively impact counselling and psychotherapy, and I stand by that. Regulation could bring professional recognition and increasing opportunities for counselling and psychotherapy to be recognised as a mainstream service offered through work programmes across diverse sectors and contexts. More political focus on the mental health of the nation provides leverage for further establishing counsellors and psychotherapists as valued contributors to the UK mental health workforce.

So, returning to the wheel of the year and to March, spring is here, summer is on its way. The sap is rising as the saying goes, heralding welcome growth, light and warmth - may you blossom in the coming months. ■

