**Belinda Ford transcript**

**Hello, and welcome to the BACP Communities of Practice podcast. Welcome to the BACP Communities of Practice podcast series. I'm Rebecca Stew, the Communities of Practice lead, and today I'm joined by Belinda Ford, who works as a clinical leader and supervisor at Relate, and is completing a professional doctorate with the Open University. Hi, Belinda. Thanks for joining my today. Could you tell me a bit about what led you to train as a therapist?**

Yes. Hi, Rebecca. So I've always been interested in counselling in relationships, and for the early part of my career, I worked in social housing, so I spent 30 years working for local authorities and housing associations, mostly in homelessness and then I moved into research and policy work. Then, when the kids left home, I thought it was about time that I thought about my other interest, which was the counselling world, and so I left housing and retrained as a counsellor. I moved straight into Relate, so I did the training with Relate and I had a placement there. That was nine, ten years ago, now, so been there ever since.

**Tell me a bit about your research for your doctorate, and what brought you to complete your professional doctorate, and what your plans are for the future.**

Yes. So when I did the initial training with Relate, which was a master's in relationship therapy, I really enjoyed being in that academic world. Then, once I'd finished my master's, which was a three-year course, I then trained as a psychosexual therapist, and I trained to work as a couples therapist for depression counsellor with the IAPT programme, and then I trained as a supervisor. So I felt like I was always going through one training after another! I really was interested in being involved in the academic world and learning about all these different parts of the counselling field. Then, on my supervisor course, I came across this model of supervision that had been put together by a chap in America. He was a psychotherapist, and his thinking around supervision was that he put the supervisor in the middle of this triangle, and at the corners, he had the client, the therapist, and then administration. He felt that the supervisor was being dragged into these different corners, and so wondered whether the role of a supervisor was more being a counsellor to your supervisee; or being an educator, training them; or whether it was about upholding an administrative side of the organisation. He worked in an organisation, as well.

So, coming from a Relate background, I felt really in tune with this model. It felt like it really spoke to me, my own experience of being a supervisor in Relate. I wanted to find out more about that, to see if other supervisors felt the same. So that was the beginnings of my thinking around doing a doctorate, and I approached the Open University and had to put forward an abstract, and so on. You know, a proposal for my research. So that's what I'm researching: I'm researching the lived experience of being a Relate supervisor. I've got 16 months to go. I've done my literature review, and the methodology. The programme at the Open University is quite structured, and the first two years are focused on, as I say, the lit review, and then the methodology, and then the third year is collecting the data. So I've now collected all my data. I've got all my fieldwork, as they say, done, and I've got the remaining 16 months to write it up and analyse all my data. So now I'm wondering what I'm going to do in the future, what I'm going to do when I finish! Well, I'm worried that I'm just going to fall off the edge of a cliff when I finish, because it's so absorbing, doing this process, doing the doctorate, and what is the future going to look like, what am I going to do. I haven't quite decided, and at the moment, it's just going through various options; thinking through whether I want to be more involved in the academic side, or whether I want to stay in practice or move into another organisation, or what it's going to look like. Anyway, it's quite an exciting place to be, really, so I'm just going with it and trying to embrace the unknown!

**Sounds like you've had such a varied career, from being in the housing to then try and do quite a few different areas of therapy, as well. Your research sounds really interesting, sounds like the supervisor role, you're being pulled in so many different directions. I guess the world is your oyster, when you've finished with your history!**

[Chuckles] Well, that's what people say. They say, 'Once you've got a doctorate, then it does bring a lot with it,' but it's hard to - at this stage - conceptualise that and understand what that means.

**Yes, still got a bit of work to do, to get to that point!**

Quite, yes!

**You're championing our clinical-supervision community and the Communities of Practice platform, and one of your posts, you ask members what they enjoy most about supervision.**

Yes.

**Can you talk about some of the things you enjoy about it, whether that's as a supervisor or a supervisee?**

Yes. Well, as a supervisor, I really enjoy supporting counsellors and working with them to think through casework that they bring, and trying to understand the client, and help the counsellor understand themselves. In Relate, we work primarily with couples, though sometimes single people, and families as well, but it's a lot of couple work. The work with the supervisee is focused onthe dynamic between the couple, a lot of the time. It is fascinating, and every couple, as you can imagine, is different. Every individual is different, so every couple certainly is. When you bring the supervisee into the mix, and thinking about what the dynamic is, and what's going on there… So I find that really interesting. Working with trainees brings another dimension, because you're watching them grow; and helping them to develop, and learn about the organisation, and learn about the field and the profession, and all of those aspects of the world that may be very knew to them. It's refreshing, in a way, to help somebody with that. You see things from their perspective, and you see things from a new angle, sometimes. I also feel very much that I learn from my supervisee, so it's very often a two-way process, so that's very rewarding.

As a supervisee, I've always welcomed the opportunity in supervision to have the space to talk to someone about something that is very important to me, and I feel that my supervisor feels it's very important to them as well, so you're meeting on a joint level, somehow, where you can share your concerns, and your hopes, your worries. You have somebody sitting with you, who is on a similar level and also can contribute, together. You can see a way forward, so I've always enjoyed that, with being a supervisee. Also, the chance to grow and develop through that supervision, and to learn about myself, to learn more about the client work, to learn about different interventions that might help with the clients.

**Sounds like a very rounded 360 journey with the sessions, giving and taking with each other. I bet it's quite an important role, working with the trainees. You're quite a figurehead in their journey to become a therapist, as well. What do you think helps and hinders that forming of the supervisory relationship?**

Those relationships are really helped by having an open dialogue and being able to trust each other. In Relate, the situation is slightly different from how it might be in private practice, because all Relate counsellors have to have a Relate supervisor, so it's all very much within the organisation. We keep it very tight, if you like. Everything is within Relate, and supervisees don't really get a chance to choose their supervisor; they're allocated a supervisor. That might be quite different from the situation in private practice or in other organisations. Going back to the question about what helps a supervisory relationship, getting to know one another at that beginning stage is critical, whether or not you've been allocated somebody or you're trying to choose somebody. Thinking about things like, can I be vulnerable with this other person; will they be able to deal with the things that I bring to them; will they allow me to go to areas that I've never been to before; can I trust them, I suppose, to some extent; will they be able to deal with conflict, or will we, as a couple, be able to deal with conflict. There's an important part about having a contract, as well, which certainly in private practice is a key part of that initial stage.

In Relate, it's slightly different, because as I say, you're allocated a supervisor, but there's still that initial stage of understanding what the parameters are; when you're going to meet, how long for; what do I do as a supervisee if I've got a question or a query between supervision sessions; is it okay to phone my supervisor. All those things, to be clear about what the arrangements are, whether or not you have a written or verbal contract - might vary - but that part of it as important. Then, as I mentioned before about being open and honest, and working in a collaborative way so that the supervisee can feel confident in bringing anything that they want to bring. They can bring casework that maybe they feel hasn't gone so well, but there isn't a sense of, 'Oh, crumbs, I can't bring this because it's going to make me look bad, it's going to make me look like I don't know what I'm doing.' So there has to be enough openness and trust where the supervisee can feel confident that they can bring whatever they need to. The power dynamic is something that needs often to be looked at, and that's something that's come up in my research with supervisors, is how is that power dynamic playing out on both sides, and how might it skew things.

As a supervisee, if there's a strong sense that the power is with the supervisor, then that may make you feel you don't want to bring things to the supervisor. Equally there's an argument that the supervisee has the power and is running rings around the supervisor. I've read all sorts of material around this, around the power dynamic. It just demonstrates all these power games that are going on, so it's something to be aware of. Ideally, it's something to discuss, to see what is actually going on, and what impact that might be having.

**Sounds like the supervisor and the supervisee need to be vulnerable with each other, to make that relationship work.**

Yes.

**You've touched on it quite a bit, there, but what thoughts do you have on enabling a learning environment in that relationship?**

Yes, creating a space that has that honesty and trust, and that is non-threatening and non-judgemental, so that everyone can relax and be themselves, so that the supervisee can be themselves and can relax, so they don't feel ashamed of what they might be bringing, and they don't feel judged by the supervisor. Again, the supervisor needs to be able to relax. It's a two-way thing, really. It is a really collaborative process, that people need to be able to be themselves, to some extent, so that they can… Learning only really happens in an environment where you are in that place, where you can absorb things and where you can be honest with yourself. Also, supervisors need to get to know their supervisee. I guess that works both ways, really. Everyone's different, and people learn in different ways, so understanding what this dynamic is between the two of you, and what's best for you.

**Within your clinical supervision community on the platform, you mentioned how groups are a great place to learn from others, where members trust each other, and they can be fully open. Why should members utilise the Communities of Practice platform for this?**

It's a great way to share ideas, and to share thoughts and concerns with like-minded people, or to share success, things that have gone well, people who do work in that same arena and who understand where you're coming from. It is a protected space, it is a closed community, so it can give an opportunity and an environment to test out new ideas for people. That's a great way, because we often work very much on our own in this world as counsellors, as supervisors, and sometimes there isn't so much opportunity to get together and share things. I'm lucky, in a way, working for an organisation like Relate, because we do have colleagues, and it is quite a big organisation, so it's slightly different, but I still think you're working quite on your own. So it does give that opportunity to get together with others, and it gives a chance to meet people. Maybe not in person, but still virtually, and maybe that could lead to other connections, which is all going to help towards developing our profession, developing the work that we do.

**You've just answered the next question [over speaking 0:15:48.1]! I was going to ask you how you see the platform enhancing counselling psychotherapy as a practice. Do you have anything else you want to add to that?**

I suppose just making those connections across the area that we work in. It is a very broad spectrum of work that this world covers. I've been struck by that, by going on the platform myself, to realise the different areas that are covered, and how it's grown, as well, over the months that it's been running. It started off with only a few areas, and now it seems every time I go on it, there's a new platform, there's a new area in there, which is great, which just demonstrates that great perspective that we have in these different areas of the work, and how much we can learn from others, and how much we can share and break down some of the silo mentality, maybe, that does exist.

**Yes, it's definitely been interesting from my point of view, from not being a practitioner, to seeing how varied therapy is. We've now got 22 communities across all the modalities, and more and more are being added every month, so it's been a really good project. It's been great to speak to you, today, Belinda, and loved hearing about your studies and your practice and your uncertain plans for the future! I look forward to seeing what you do next. Thanks so much for coming on the Communities of Practice podcast. I look forward to seeing more of your posts on the platform.**

Okay. Thanks, Rebecca.

**Thank you for listening to the BACP Communities of Practice podcast. We hope you enjoyed it. Don't forget, you can get in touch via communities@bacp.co.uk if you'd like more information on how to get involved with the Communities of Practice platform.**