

Editorial

Tēnā koutou

Welcome to this edition of the *New Zealand Journal of Counselling*, the journal of Te Roopu Kaiwhiriwhiri o Aotearoa, the New Zealand Association of Counsellors.

Writing this editorial in the last week of a level four lockdown for Covid-19, it is hard for us to avoid the notion that life in Aotearoa New Zealand and across the globe has and will remain unpredictable for all of us for some time to come. In this uncertain future we are beginning to discern the shape of a new ‘normal’ that is likely to force us all at some stage to confront the realities and meaning of our existence, and the value and durability of our relationships. Covid-19 has presented us with a myriad of unasked-for choices and challenges in a space that for many may already contain accumulated injuries and losses, psychological discomfort, and existential fear. And yet, this unprecedented global event has also demonstrated the very best of what it means to be positively human. Selflessness and kindness and simple acts of heroism are to be found everywhere.

Limited by the facts of social isolation and distancing, we will find ourselves dwelling upon our personal concerns, our professional expectations, and our capacity to continue to support others. However, as counsellors we know it is at times like these that we need to remind ourselves that we are resourceful, creative, resilient, and responsive to change, and that our work is necessary if we are to get through this together.

As journal editors, as well as counsellor educators, we have noticed the global shift in higher education from face-to-face teaching to the use of online learning platforms and a blended/flexible delivery method. This has provoked some resistance from those of us who regard counselling as a primarily relational practice and who advocate for the continuing efficacy of face-to-face modelling and learning. However, at this time of crisis and lockdown we have been forced to acknowledge that, if we are to continue to teach, we currently have no alternative but to embrace online learning with greater enthusiasm. With little prior experience of Zoom meetings, we have found ways to teach the relational practices of counselling online, resulting in some wonderful and quite unanticipated outcomes for transformational learning. While we are not suggesting that this method of delivery is more effective, or even more desirable than face-to-face work, we will admit that it does provide us with a good example of the way in which difficult life events can cause us to dig deep, examine our prejudices, enthusiastically make use of what is available, and adopt fresh perspectives and opportunities at greater speed than we might have under normal circumstances. Similarly, if using familiar routines and approaches is no longer possible or effective in reaching out to our clients, then we must be bold in the application of new technologies and approaches to support us in our professional practice, and to use what might ordinarily have taken us years to embrace.

A similar challenge has faced many of you as you have moved your counselling practice from meeting in person to online forums. A richness and generosity of sharing how to practise ethically and safely, and ways to survive the tiring demands of working via Zoom have graced and circulated our counsellor Facebook pages, newsletters, and professional forums. We are aware that there are already countless stories of ‘newness’ and ‘change’ among us as a professional counselling community that we would love to see form the basis of articles in the coming issues of our journal. We would encourage grasping formal avenues and scheduling activities with colleagues to capture these new ways of practice through research projects and/or reflective writing or opinion pieces. Working together often transports our hopes and best intentions to write up our practice into making it happen.

For this current issue, we express our huge admiration to the authors of the four articles published here as each of them has continued to liaise with us amid this Covid crisis to prepare

their work for publication. We would like to thank all of them for their generosity, diligence, and collegiality in making their research available here at this time.

Working with young people is a strong focus this time and, unsurprisingly, three out of the four articles featured here offer insight into a number of issues that are highly relevant to the practices of counselling and teaching. The lived accounts of our counselling researchers and their participants offer unique perspectives on the experience and storytelling of violence and its impact on identity formation, and how school counsellors respond to non-suicidal self-injury. The final article in this series raises awareness about the meanings attributed to 'giftedness' in young people and argues for the establishment of a safe space in which to work effectively with gifted young people and their whānau. Finally, and of no less importance, this issue is completed by an article that takes an in-depth look at the spiritual lives of gay men in Aotearoa New Zealand that seeks to understand how these two influential factors have contributed to their identities.

The first contribution by Matt Judd and Paul Flanagan is a story of hope. It provides a clear snapshot of the authors' narrative practice with Carl, a young man, 'troubled by violence'. This individual case study demonstrates and maps the subtle shifts in movement that can occur when the narrative therapy practice of re-authoring stories, specifically those that involve violence, is used with a young person. In this case the approach enables the young client to challenge unhelpful constructions of masculinity, take up a 'non-violent identity or identities' and author an alternative story for his future life. This work takes a detailed look at the process and offers some useful insights into this subtle practice.

The research on school counsellors' experiences of working with students presenting with Non-Suicidal Self-Injury (NSSI), carried out by Jessica Garisch, Kealagh Robinson, and Marc Wilson, is an informative account of the nature of NSSI that conveys particularly how this struggle in young people is still poorly understood by many helping professionals in our school environments. As such it signposts ways in which counsellors might begin to sensitively understand, support, and work with these young people in the wider school community and educational system. This research is a timely contribution to an area of growing concern.

In a similar vein, Melanie Wong's research with parents and other adults involved with young people identified as gifted challenges educational institutions to recognise that these students have a uniquely constellated set of needs and issues. Through her informants' observations and experiences, Wong's research reveals the identity struggles that gifted young people often have to manage alone and suggests that being gifted does not immediately negate these issues or suggest that the individual is able to deal with them on their own. In her awareness-raising article Wong examines the ways in which giftedness is commonly understood and socially constructed and how this might even lead to the perpetuation of these young people's struggles.

The final article in this issue is a qualitative research study by David Sander and Jan Wilson. This small-scale study provides a valuable in-depth exploration of the lived experiences of eight gay men in Aotearoa New Zealand. Beginning with a journey of acceptance that they are gay, the participants discuss how they have integrated their spiritual beliefs with their sexuality. While this research contributes to what is already known about being a gay man in Aotearoa, the emerging themes from these participant interviews also suggest that these men also attribute the development and integration of their sexual identities to the positive values and social resources provided by spirituality and religions in their formative years. In seeking to understand and support the ongoing process for gay men of integrating spiritual and sexual identities, this work finishes with a number of pertinent recommendations for counsellors.

There are important days ahead for us all, and our editorial team will certainly be considering the role of our journal in supporting you as professionals to support yourselves as

you reach out to clients in the aftermath of the pandemic. For a time at least, face-to-face counselling will give way to remote counselling, and as online supervision, professional development and training and research become normal activities, so our journal will continue to play a crucial role in disseminating your work.

On another note, we are delighted to welcome Dr Paul Flanagan to the journal as a new co-editor. He is currently the Professional Leader of Counsellor Education Programmes at Te Whare Wananga o Waikato, the University of Waikato. Many of you will also know Paul from his years of membership and active involvement with NZAC. It is also very timely that Paul has co-authored one of the articles in this current issue with Matt Judd. We look forward to working with you, Paul.

Finally, it is our hope that in the future we can extend our editorial board membership and develop our international representation, to strengthening the journal's online presence and to working with you in your professional development and practice.

In closing, we look forward to receiving your articles and your ideas, and sincerely hope that you stay well, remain active, and keep in touch with each other.

Ehara taku toa i te toa takitahi, engari, he toa takitini—Success is not the work of one, but the work of many.

Enjoy this current issue.

Nāku noa, na Peter māua ko Janet

Peter Bray and Janet May

Editors

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