**Rebecca Stew talks to Bryony Harper transcript**

**Hello, and welcome to the BACP Communities of Practice podcast. Welcome to the BACP Communities of Practice podcast series, episode four. I'm Rebecca Stew, the Communities of Practice lead, and today, I'm joined by Briony Harper, who is a humanistic counsellor. Briony currently works as a lecturer in counselling and psychological therapies at Nottingham Trent University. Hiya Briony. Thanks for joining me today. Could you tell me a bit about what led you to train as a therapist and the areas of practice that you focus on?**

Thanks, Rebecca. It's great to be talking to you today. So first, I experienced therapy when I was a teenager, and then knew that I also wanted to help others, but at the time, I wasn't really sure how to go about training. So I went to the University of Nottingham and initially went to study German and Dutch, and while I was there, I came to find that they had a humanistic counselling course. So I changed my course, studied the humanistic counselling, and focused on person-centred counselling as part of that. I initially, then worked in schools with children and young people, then specialised in trauma and sexual violence working with adults. Now, I mostly focus on work within equality, diversity, and inclusion, so I was a member of the BACP EDI task and finish group, and the EDI strategy recently launched as well. These experiences led me to really develop a further interest in how counselling and counsellors can contribute towards social change.

**Social change within counselling is quite a new area for counselling in the UK, isn't it? I think social change is sometimes a concept that we can take for granted, as change is constant. I read an interesting quote recently saying that, 'Whilst we accept that change is constant, we don't have to accept that we're powerless in its wake.' The work that you seem to be doing kind of leads into that, doesn't it? I'd love to hear what social change means to you and how you engage with social change as a counsellor.**

Yes, so I think that's a great quote, and for me, when I was counselling individual clients, I was hearing about, increasingly, experiences of poverty and marginalisation, and really felt that no amount of individual counselling could fully address these issues that clients were experiencing. Then, when I was working in sexual violence services, I heard the Desmond Tutu quote, which says, 'There comes a point where we need to stop pulling people out of the river. We need to go upstream and find out why they're falling in.' For me, the social change is the going upstream. It's looking for ways of engaging beyond the individual level, beyond counselling, that benefit well-being more widely. So still feeling really tied into the things I wanted to achieve, and want to achieve as a counsellor, of trying to benefit the well-being of clients, but almost before they fall in the river.

**I really like that quote. It really makes you stop and think, doesn't it? What are you most interested in, in terms of social change at the moment, and what would need to change to create a better society, in your opinion?**

There are so many thoughts about what social change is required. So thinking about the work I've been doing in EDI, looking at tackling oppression in all sorts of forms, so racism, homophobia, transphobia, sexism, ableism, ageism, classism, all the isms. I think I've been learning more about other ways of approaching that as well, so learning more about work around de-colonisation, and there are some interesting campaigns as well that look at work and the economy. Ideas like universal basic income and four-day work week trials, which have been interesting things discussed in the media recently. Essentially, with all these ideas, the key theme, I think, is ideas that value humanity over our productivity. So I think, for me that's the key area of social change is just social change that helps, as a society, us to move away from valuing ourselves as being productive or as consumers and more towards our own humanity and valuing that.

**There's so many new areas to get your teeth into, isn't there? It's a really interesting area of counselling. As well as being involved in the EDI task and finish group and the Good Practice Steering Group, you've recently become a Communities of Practice Champion. You champion the counsellors for social change community on the platform offering a space to learn and share ideas about engaging with social change within and alongside counselling practices. What drew you into the project, and how do you see the platform enhancing counselling and psychotherapy as a practice?**

So, I don't see myself as an expert in this area at all, and that's part of the reason that I wanted to start this community. I wanted to learn more, get more involved. I felt that I was often hearing about things after they'd happened. So, for example, the protests around seeking a trans-inclusive ban on conversion therapy was something that I would have loved to have been involved with but was only hearing about them after they'd happened. So I really wanted to use the Communities of Practice platform as a way of finding out what is happening, a way of sharing ideas and collaborating as well.

**You've asked your community to share what organisations and resources they've found useful in terms of social change. Can you share some of your own favourites?**

Yes, so prior to starting this group, a lot of the information that I found has been within books. I'm currently reading Mick Cooper's new book, *Psychology at the Heart of Social Change*, which looks at integrating ideas from psychology and psychotherapy into politics. Another book that I've found useful in thinking about social change is *The Body Is Not an Apology* by Sonya Renee Taylor, which looks at radical self-love as a tool for social change. So I think that, obviously, as a person-centred therapist as well, this idea of unconditional positive regard and self-unconditional positive regard really aligned well with the ideas that Sonya outlines in terms of radical self-love and social change as well. I've also been aware of the work of specific counselling organisations, so things like Pink Therapy and Black Minds Matter that are really doing some of that specific work around social change. I really want to learn more about what is out there, and I'd be really grateful to anyone sharing their knowledge on the Communities of Practice platform.

**I feel like we could do a whole series on this topic, actually! [laughs] We'll have to get you back again.**

There's so much.

**We'll have to get you back to do another podcast really going into the detail of some of this. It's been really great speaking with you today, Briony, and hearing about your practice, how you got into therapy, and some of the areas that you're interested in. Thank you so much for coming on the Communities of Practice podcast, and I really look forward to seeing more of your posts on the platform.**

Thank you. It's been nice talking to you.

**[Background music]**

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