**Rebecca Stew talks to Michelle Fernandes transcript**

**Hello and welcome to the BACP Communities of Practice podcast. Welcome to the BACP Communities of Practice podcast series, episode two. I'm Rebecca Stew, the Communities of Practice lead, and today I'm joined by Michelle Fernandes, one of our student members who's studying person-centred therapy. She's got a lot of interest in bereavement and grief. Hi, Michelle. 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 your studies are currently focusing on?**

Hi, Rebecca. Thanks for letting me be part of this. For me, what led me to becoming a therapist was that there's been different points in my life where I've had experience with therapy as a client. So I think I've already had quite a lot of awareness of the therapeutic process from that perspective. Being able to have that support at different points in my life has then led me to do voluntary and employed work in different non-profit organisations as well. In one of my previous roles, I did work with quite a lot of different mental health clinicians, and some of them were therapists. So having the chance to interact with people of those different backgrounds, I think it's what led me to be interested in supporting clients. So being on the other side of the therapeutic relationship. I did a counselling course with my local college, and that was right in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic. It's quite an interesting time to start my journey into the counselling field, but I've been really enjoying the process, and I've just been progressing up to where I am currently doing my master's

It's been a really interesting process for me to learn more about the expectations of being a therapist and just what will be expected from me with my clients as well. In terms of my studies, the focus is on person-centred therapy. So mostly Carl Rogers, but in terms of some of the areas we're looking at, at the moment, we've been covering some topics about human development across the lifespan, different attachment theories. Actually, one of the big areas for this year has been about bereavement and grief. I think that's helped generate my interest in the topic even more.

**That's a really interesting journey you're going on. You briefly mentioned it there, you champion our bereavement and grief community on the platform as well, and you've got some really interesting discussions on there at the moment. One of the topics, making sense of grief, is the top viewed within your community, and it's got some really useful resources shared from yourself and fellow members, such as the Lois Tonkin's fried egg model of growing around grief. You've got some YouTube suggestions in there as well. How will you be supporting your clients in making sense of the grief that they're experiencing?**

Well, for me, I think one of the most important things is facilitating the space for them to actually have the chance to look at the grief. I think generally in society, maybe we don't talk about grief as much as we could, though I think following situations such as the pandemic, it's maybe opened up that discussion a bit more. So for me, it will be important to make sure they've got the space and the chance to really look into their grief a bit more. I think it will be useful to make references to some models like the Lois Tonkin's fried egg model. I think it will also be important to not put them into a mould, so to speak. I think it's important for me to be as open-minded as the client in looking at the grief as well. Just because grief - people have different perspectives of grief - don't they? It's a very individual process. So I view it as almost a mutual way in making sense of the grief together and understanding how it impacts them individually.

**You've posted about how grief might find its roots in one's culture, which is an interesting idea. How do you think you will adapt that to your therapy, and how are you going to accommodate that within your practice?**

Yes, it's definitely been an area of interest for me and for me being able to adapt my own approach. For me, it's important to be curious about somebody's culture. I view culture as being a key part to the blueprint of how somebody interprets their own grief, but also how they actually go through the grieving process. A big part of that would be to take the time to understand how somebody actually identifies with their own culture and how they interact with it as well as how that influences how they may discuss their own grief or how they may actually undertake grief work in their own personal time to be able to adapt my approach in return. I think as much as I will be there to try to facilitate the process, ultimately, the client will be the one guiding me to understand what they're going through and how their culture is influencing them. For me, there's also something really important about engaging in that continual professional development to understand more about different cultures.

I'm looking forward to being able to learn more from my clients about their different cultures but also having the chance to undertake further training to then help me adapt my therapy when I'm seeing clients.

**I love the idea that it's part of the blueprint of who we are. I like that. You're about to complete a placement at a hospice as part of your training, aren't you? You've discussed the common themes of memories and associations on the platform already. Could you talk a bit about this and your expectations of the role whilst you're in that placement?**

Yes. I can start off with talking about my expectations, and it's interesting because I feel like my expectation is almost not to have expectations. I think clients will be able to bring so many different things, and I know that I can't predict what type of clients I'm going to get and how they may discuss their own grief anyway. So for me, I'm very open to what my hospice work will bring for my own practice and development as a practitioner. I think if I had to name one particular expectation is that I'll actually find it really enlightening. Like I said before, the grief process is so individual for people, and I think just by being able to have that open conversation it opens up your own perspective of grief. It may influence how you individually engage in the grief process. So that is one of my expectations, but also trying not to have expectations at the same time. With the common themes of memories and associations, I feel like when engaging in hospice work, I think particularly clients will have their own memories tied to even attending a hospice setting.

It may be that they've had people in those types of settings, and it brings up emotions for them. Even for me, working in a hospice, it's likely to bring up feelings about my own losses that I've had during my life as well. So I'm prepared for those memories or associations to come up, and then they'll be important for me to engage in the supervision process, to understand it more for myself, and to be able to give the best service to my clients.

**You're also active in the students' community, and you offer advice, and you share resources as well in there. Can you talk a bit about why the student members should utilise the Communities of Practice platform and how it can be useful as a student member?**

Definitely. I think, as a student myself, beginning to dive into the world of therapy can be quite daunting. Sometimes you may not necessarily know where to start in beginning to network with other people. So I think for students, it's a great platform to be able to speak to different practitioners of varying levels. Especially because you may have not interacted with those types of practitioners in a face-to-face setting. I think if anything from the COVID-19 pandemic had shown us the importance of online platforms and how it could kind of open up our own world and have the chance to engage with people we may have not necessarily had the chance to engage with before. So I think from that perspective, the networking aspect is really important. Also, just to normalise the experience that students will be going through as well. I think sometimes going through this type of training can be very intense and very demanding.

So I think it can be good for students to engage with each other on the platform and understand that what they're going through may be normal or just to understand how other students are engaging in their own studies and whether they could pick up some tips that it could bring to their own practice.

**You've touched on it a little bit just a moment ago, but how do you see the platform enhancing counselling and psychotherapy as a whole?**

I see it as a way to unify perspectives about counselling and psychotherapy. I mean, for me, I've grown up with online communities, so I think it's a really important source of connection as well. I think when we take the time to connect with people, in turn, we can then establish an almost common ground of practice within the counselling profession. So for me, just having the chance and to have accessibility to that type of platform, I feel, will make people consider their own practice and, in turn, encourage conversations of how we can improve the counselling field as a whole, not just individually, but how we work as a profession and as a field.

**Yes, I agree. I think the platform as a whole; it's got the potential to be such a wealth of knowledge for our members, regardless of the topic they're reading. The peer learning aspect is proving really valuable at the moment. It's bringing out a lot of collaborative work between unsuspecting groups of members. So there's so much potential there. Yes, it's an exciting time for BACP and what we're offering at the moment. It's been really nice to talk to you today, Michelle, and hearing about your studies and your practice and plans for the future. Thank you very much for coming on the Communities of Practice podcast, and I look forward to seeing more of your posts on the platform.**

Thank you. It's been really nice to be a part of it, and I'll be looking seeing more people joining the platform as well and engaging in the discussions.

**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 our communitiesatbacp.co.uk if you'd like more information on how to get involved with the Communities of Practice platform.**